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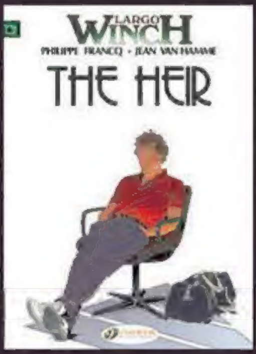
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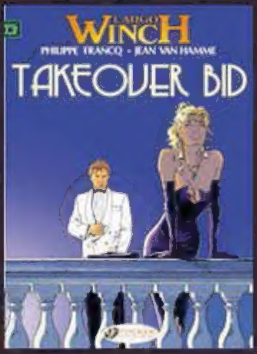
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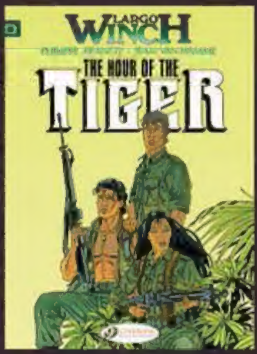
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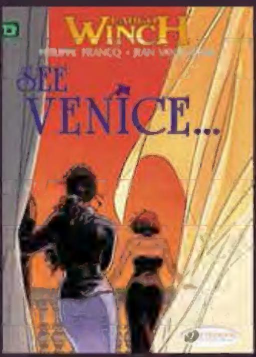
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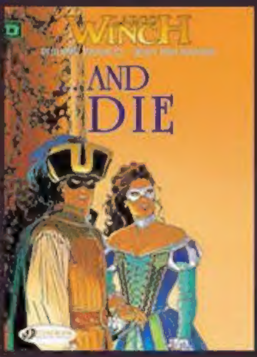
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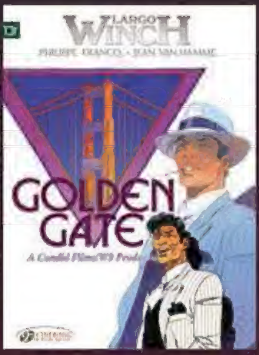
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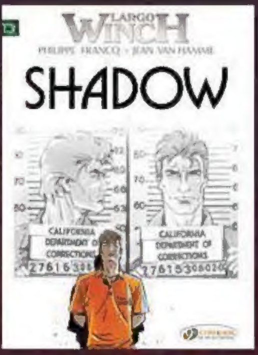
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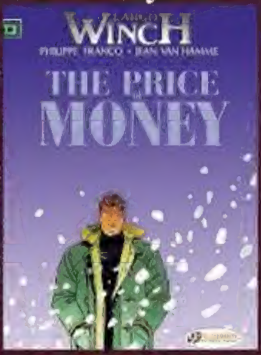
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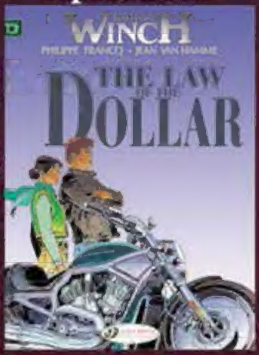
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***The Dark Knight* wallet image © DC Comics**

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Brought to you by: Drinking pints of delicious beer with *Judge Dredd* creators Carlos Ezquerra and John Wagner at the SFX Weekender; art editor Mark Mitchell's never-before-seen art by Massimo Belardinelli; the recovery of Rob Power, who broke both hands at Christmas (!); the ineffable wonder of Rob's girlfriend Amy Swapp, our unofficial Weekender photographer; the discovery of the 1989 *Judge Dredd Annual* in my mum's loft (Dracula in Mega-City One!); anecdotes about film director Tarsem Singh screaming "You bloody dog!" down the phone at our very own Matt Bielby.

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"Is it a bit like having an extra pocket?"

THE GOOD GUYS

Heroes! Who's the best? Batman? Superman? Spider-Man? Arm-Fall-Off Boy?[*] After last issue's top 50 villains, with your help, we've rated the 50 best good guys in comics, and you can find out who's at the top of the heap starting on page 18. (And you can find out who we think are the WORST heroes in comics on page 64. No guessing where Matter-Eater Lad[**] ends up...)

Elsewhere, famed documentary maker Morgan Spurlock talks to us about the film he's been waiting to make all his life – an account of San Diego Comic Con, with the aid of Joss Whedon and Stan Lee. (Have comics finally conquered the world? Perhaps so – surely the arrival of *The Avengers* movie this summer will tell us... and you can find out all about that in the next issue!)

As ever, though, it's not all superheroes, and we celebrate evergreen Brit anthology *2000 AD* with flagship features on *Judge Dredd* and legendary artist Massimo Belardinelli[***]. Then there's interviews with Ed Brubaker, Nick Abadzis, the art of Jamie McKelvie, and, and... too late! Out of space![****]

Jes

Jes Bickham,
Editor

---

[*] Nope, we didn't make him up – see page 67. Plorp!
[**] Can we start the bring back Matter-Eater Lad campaign now? No? Oh.
[***] Some of his work: *Sláine, Ace Trucking Co.,* an ill-fated but mind-blowingly gorgeous reboot of *Dan Dare*. We love 'im.
[****] Enjoy the issue, readers!

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1. SIDEKICK SAMPLER COMIC
Sidekick returns! And it's awash with a plethora of preview strips, not least a complete story from Iain Sinclair and the mighty Dave McKean, courtesy of SelfMadeHero! Gosh.

2. 2000 AD BADGES
Thanks to The Mighty Tharg we've got thrill-overloaded pin badges sporting a never-before-seen Brian Bolland Judge Dredd, Nikolai Dante and Tharg himself! Scrotnig, as they say.

3. GIANT DOUBLE-SIDED POSTER
DC's New 52 and *American Vampire*, ready for your wall!

DC COMICS
THE NEW 52
AMERICAN VAMPIRE
SCOTT SNYDER • RAFAEL ALBUQUERQUE
VERTIGO

MEET THE TEAM

Ladies, prepare to swoon – it's the *Comic Heroes* team!

MATT BIELBY

Matt was amazed to find one of our Top 50 Heroes has his own clothing line: not t-shirts, but posh Italian menswear. Guess who it is?

It's Corto Maltese: buy at luisaviaroma.com

MATTHEW BADHAM

Stranded in the northern rad-wastes of Brit-Cit, Citizen Badham ekes out a living writing celebrity porno-zines and the odd article about comics. His best years are behind him. He writes for money and, often, food.

MICHAEL MOLCHER

Warning: do not allow droid caffeine levels to drop below 90% as sudden combustion may occur. Store in a cool, dry place and water regularly. This model is not suitable for outdoor use.

JAMES LOVEGROVE

Mighty Cthulhu, forgive me! When I used some Aklo in a review last issue, a production error replaced all the apostrophes with acute-accented 'i's. I didn't mean to profane your sacred language. No! I'm sorry! Aaarrrggghhh!!!

ROB POWER

After breaking both his hands on New Year's Day, Rob has been recovering with the help of Marvel's digital comics archive and an operation that replaced his metacarpal with a metal plate, four screws and half a custard cream.

STEPHEN JEWELL

Stephen really wishes he kept his frankly enormous comic book collection in better order. It saves so much time when you have to find that all-important back issue to research a *Comic Heroes* story, you see...

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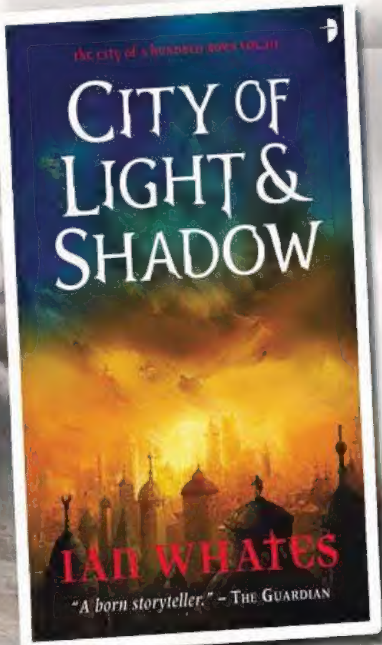
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HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FOR ALL THINGS COMICS!

Clash of the titans

Marvel's mightiest are on course for the mother of all showdowns

As the House of Idea's editor-in-chief Axel Alonso told us last issue, annual blockbuster events are a key part of Marvel's business plan, pulling in readers even if the inevitable plethora of tie-ins and spin-offs alienates critics. After Captain America and Thor teamed up in last year's *Fear Itself* to coincide with their respective big screen outings, the Earth's Mightiest Heroes themselves will take centre stage in *Avengers Vs X-Men*, which hits stores in April just before the highly-anticipated release of Joss Whedon's *The Avengers.*

TWO TRIBES

"If you look back over the past decade, The Avengers have been at the heart of just about every large-scale event that we've done, so this wasn't really any different," says *Avengers* editor Tom Brevoort. "But given that there'll be a film in cinemas all across the globe, worldwide awareness of the characters is never going to be higher, so it'd be foolish not to try to take advantage of that. But it's very much in keeping with what we've been doing in the past."

Revolving around the rebirth of the all-powerful Phoenix force, the bi-weekly, 12-issue series proved so ambitious that it required the imaginative skills of all five of Marvel's primary architects – Brian Michael Bendis, Jason Aaron, Ed Brubaker, Matt Fraction and Jonathan Hickman – who will alternate on scripting duties.

"It was a different way of building an event series and it seemed like an interesting challenge – and one that everyone was interested in taking up," continues Brevoort. "Having creators from all across the Marvel line made it much easier to ensure that the events of *Avengers Vs X-Men* would have relevance for the entirety of the line, even beyond just their own titles."

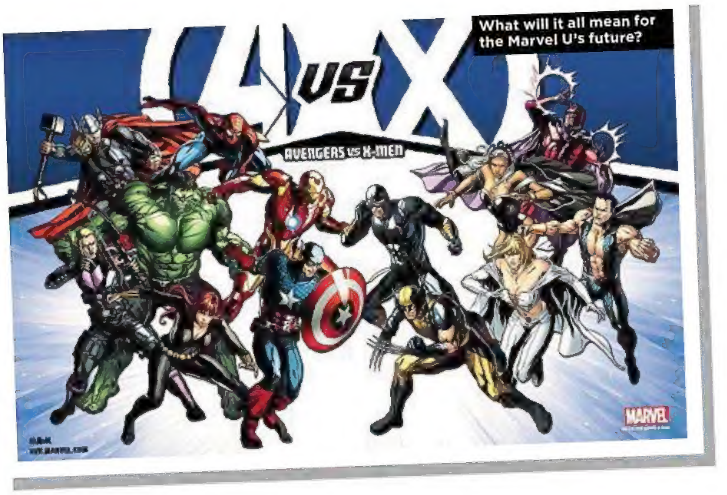
Broken down into three distinctive acts, Oliver Coipel, Adam Kubert and John Romita Jr will share the considerable artistic workload.

"We needed artists who excel at both small moments and widescreen action," says Alonso. "And JR Jr, Oliver and Adam certainly fit that bill."

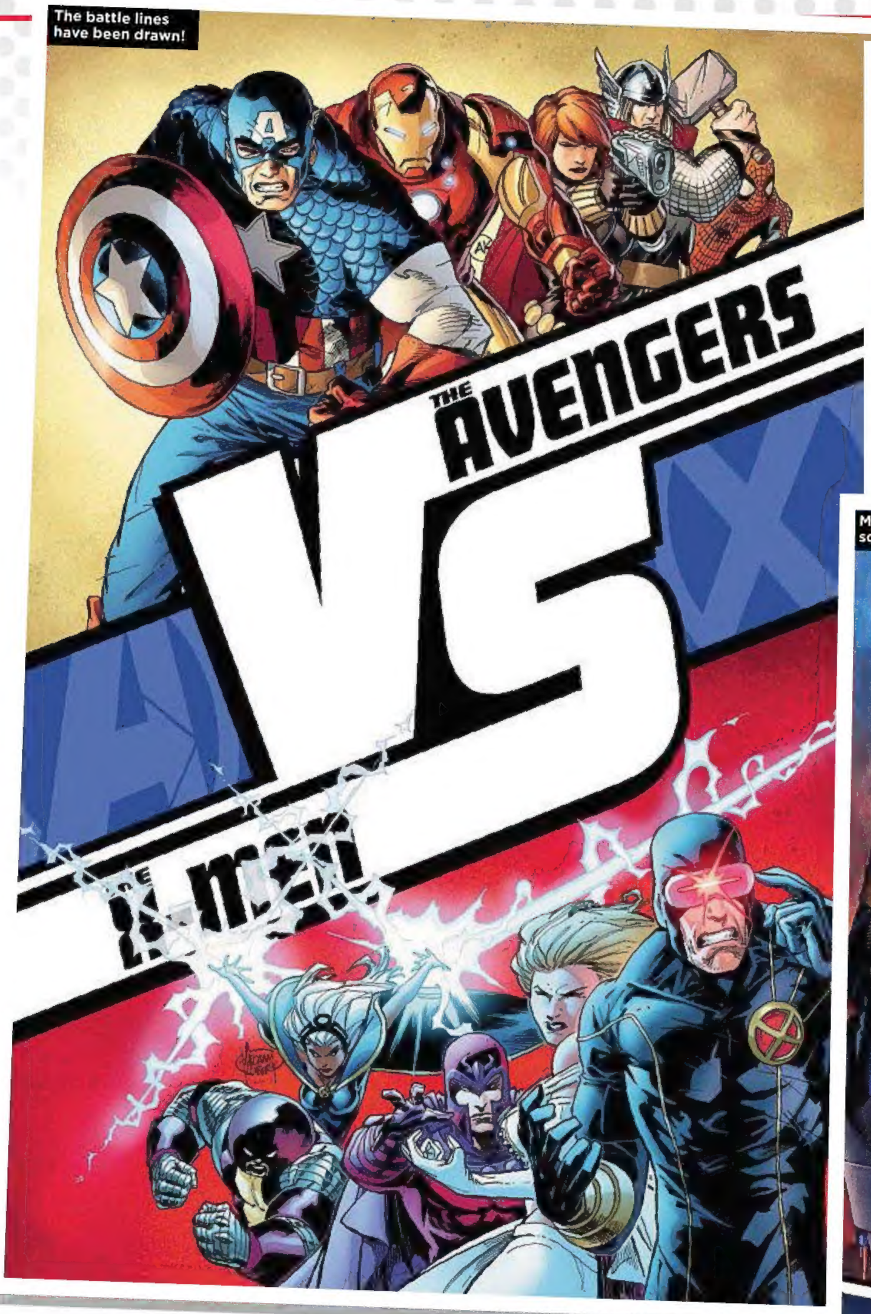
"It also means that there'll be visual consistency and continuity throughout the series from issue to issue," adds Brevoort. "And most of the writers will get to work with all of the artists in turn."

With *Avengers* scribe Brian Michael Bendis and *Wolverine And The X-Men*'s Jason Aaron joining forces for a special zero issue in March, the imminent threat of the Phoenix will amplify existing tensions between the X-Men and the rest of Marvel's superhuman community, placing mutant Avengers Wolverine and Storm in particularly invidious positions.

"Any storyline in which the X-Men play a headlining role is going to comment on issues of

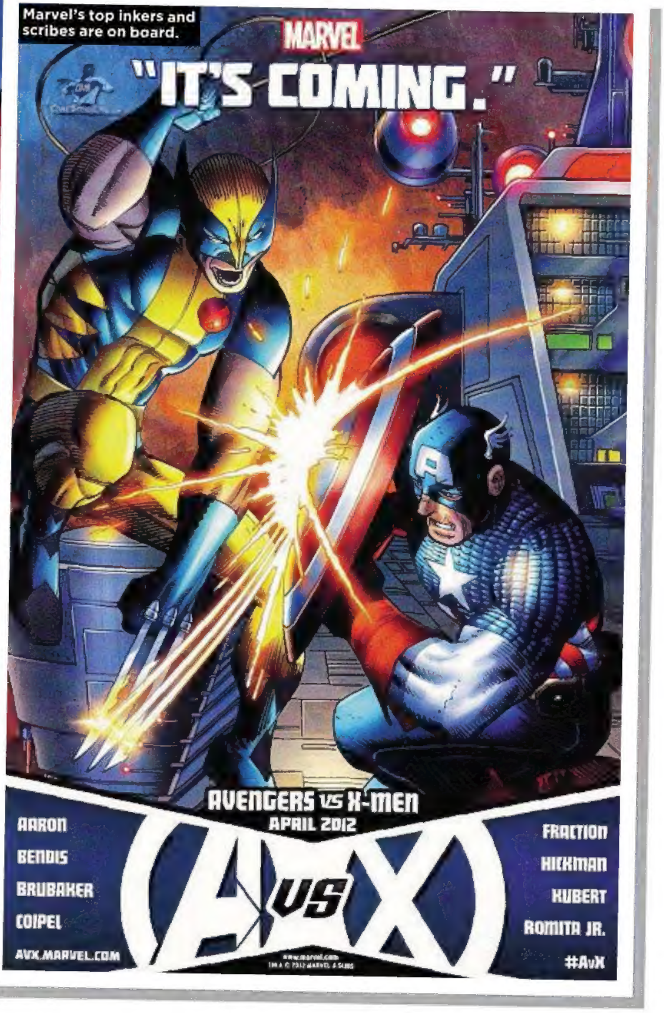

What will it all mean for the Marvel U's future?

> "It's only a matter of time before things get out of hand"



The battle lines have been drawn!

It's all going to get really messy!



Marvel's top inkers and scribes are on board.

mutant prejudice in some way," says Brevoort. "The X-Men and The Avengers have a lot of history between them, so any confrontation they have is going to be fraught with pitfalls. Throw in a situation in which the two groups are philosophically diametrically opposed and it's only a matter of time before things get out of hand."

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

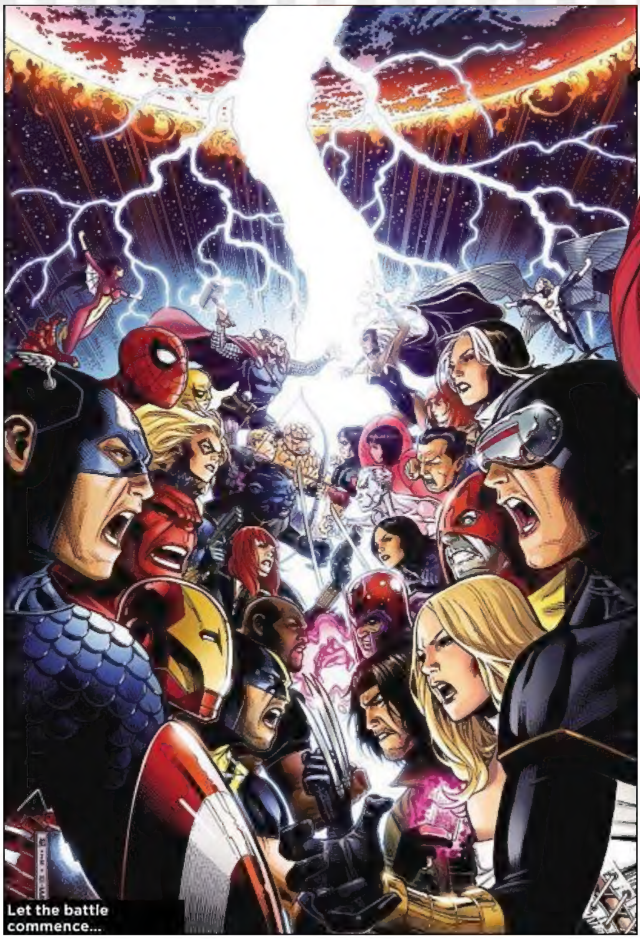
Selected to be the Phoenix's new host, teenage telepath Hope will achieve a destiny she has been moving towards since debuting in 2007 X-crossover 'Messiah Complex', revealing that flaming red hair is not the only thing she has in common with the late Jean Grey. "Hope's journey has formed the backbone of the X-Men line's story for the last few years so *Avengers Vs X-Men* is the culmination of a ton of advance planning," says Brevoort. "Everything has led to this point for the character. There are definitely portents that can be seen in 'Generation Hope' as to how events are likely to play out and what will happen when the Phoenix Force arrives."

Jeph Loeb and Ed McGuinness' *Avengers: X-Sanction* also foreshadows *Avengers Vs X-Men*'s forthcoming cataclysms as Hope's adoptive father Cable returns, Terminator-style, from the dead and the future to take on the likes of Captain America, Iron Man and the Red Hulk.

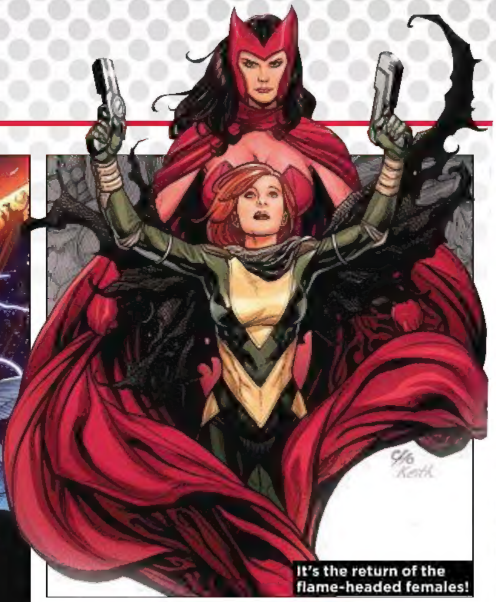
"He comes back to the present to take the Avengers off the board for something they haven't done yet – something that could have dire consequences for tomorrow," says Brevoort. "The question of that something leads us directly into *Avengers Vs X-Men* proper."

After a brief respite in 2010 to concentrate on smaller, more contained crossovers like 'Shadowland' and 'Chaos War', Marvel has shaken its universe to its very foundations over the past two years with first *Fear Itself* and now *Avengers Vs X-Men*, posing questions about how they can possibly better that in 2013. However, Brevoort insists that bigger is not always best.

"Anything that is done to repetition will eventually become boring so it's necessary to keep switching things up, to try different approaches and to never lose sight of the emotional truth that is the core of each story you present," he reasons. "Without that resonance at the heart of any story, large or small, it just becomes a bunch of action figures smashing into one another. But I never worry about not being able to top what we did in the past because we'll always try to come up with another idea, a fresh twist or a different approach. We took a little bit of a breather a couple of years ago because we'd heard that the readership was becoming burned out but it feels like it's time to get big again, and *Avengers Vs X-Men* is about the biggest thing we could come up with. It's massive!" **CH**



Let the battle commence...



It's the return of the flame-headed females!

MARK MILLAR
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Big names collaborate on *The Secret Service*.

Thunderbolts (of all eras) are go!

Alien goings-on in *Saucer Country #1*.

New comics

James Hunt peers through the veil at what's lurking in the distance

Unsure which big releases to buy? Wish you knew in advance what titles will be on everyone's lips? Don't worry, help is at hand courtesy of *Comic Heroes*' regular look at the must-read releases that will be landing on comic shop shelves over the next two months!

MARVEL

All eyes are on the launch of Marvel's next big event in March and April, *Avengers Vs X-Men*.

Written by the Marvel 'architects' and drawn by top-flight artists, the story kicks off with the first meeting of the Scarlet Witch and Hope Summers in March's *Avengers Vs X-Men #0* (Bendis/ Aaron & Cho), leading into April's *Avengers Vs X-Men #1* (Bendis, Romita Jr) and *AVX: VS #1*, a book solely dedicated to character bust-ups. Tie-ins will appear in pretty much any book with 'Avengers' or 'X-Men' in the title, so if you're a fan of this idea, you'll be spoilt for choice. Even if you're not keen, there's still plenty going on. Bendis launches *Avengers Assemble #1* with Mark Bagley in April, his third (and final!) Avengers title featuring the movie's cast, but set in the regular Marvel Universe. If you want to read about the movie cast in the movie universe, though, March and April see all four issues of *Prelude To Marvel's The Avengers*, a lead-in to this summer's movie written by Chris Yost.

It's not all AVX in the mutant-verse either. Spinning out of the critically acclaimed *X-Force*, David Lapham launches *Age of Apocalypse #1* in March, a new ongoing series set in the fan-favourite alternate universe where our world's anti-mutant villains are the heroes. And, finally, the Thunderbolts meet the original Thunderbolts in April's *Thunderbolts #172*.

Fans of Marvel's street-level characters won't want to miss Mark Waid and Greg Rucka teaming up in April for the three-issue 'Omega Effect' crossover, which encompasses *Avenging Spider-Man #6*, *The Punisher #10* and *Daredevil #11*. And finally, Matt Fraction begins a new story arc in jumping-on issue, *The Mighty Thor #12.1* as Thor finally meets... Don Blake?

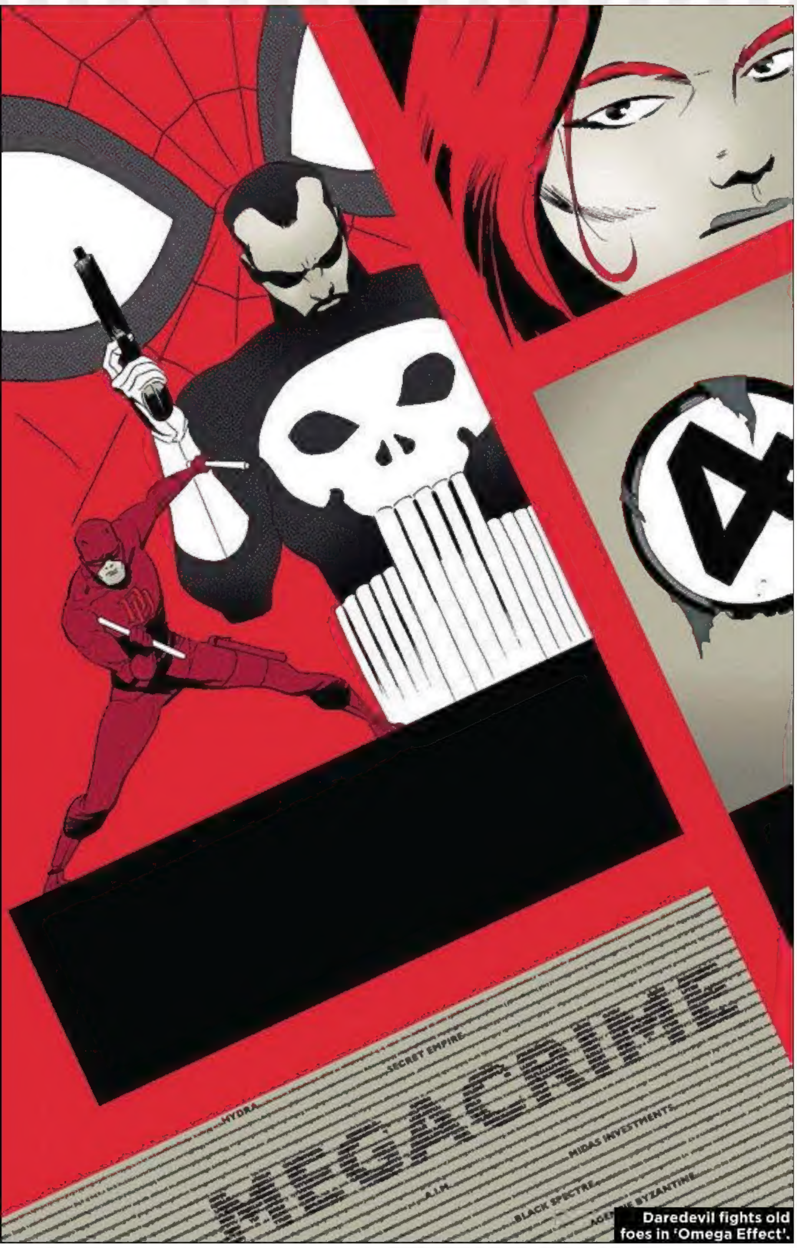
DC

It's mostly business as usual for the New 52 in March, although keep an eye out for Gene Ha and Gary Frank drawing *Justice League #7*, as well as the return of Rags Morales on art in *Action Comics #7*. Further creative reshuffles see former Marvel editor-in-chief Tom DeFalco take over as writer in *Legion Lost #7*, while Marc Bernardin handles the adventures of Static in *Static Shock #7*.

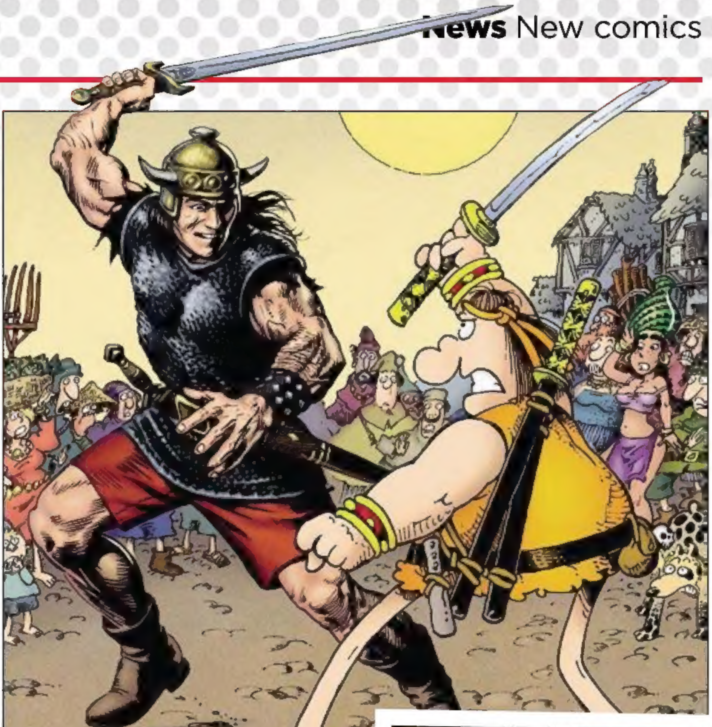
Of course, DC is also preparing for the release of *The Dark Knight Rises*, so as well as a reprint of Bane's first (and greatest) storyline in *Batman: Knightfall Vol 1* in March (with *Vol 2* following in April) you can also find an all-new story featuring the man who broke the bat in *Batman: The Dark Knight #7*, by Paul Jenkins and David Finch. Bat-fans will also want to check out *Batman: Arkham Unhinged #1* in April, a collection of comics set in the world of the hit video game, *Batman: Arkham City*.

It's not just Batman getting the attention, though – in April, witness the explosive conclusion of Grant Morrison's first storyline in *Action Comics #8*, while living legend and iconic Supergirl artist George Pérez contributes art to *Supergirl #8* (let's hope she comes out of it alive this time!).

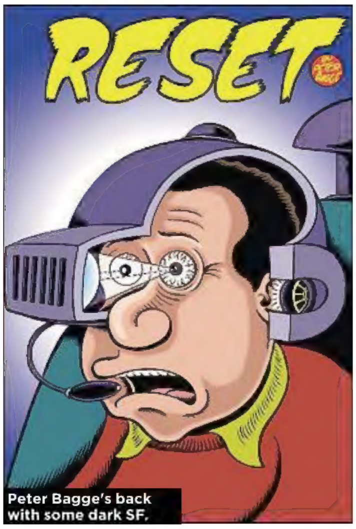
Outside of the DC Universe, prepare yourself for March's *Saucer Country #1*, a new Vertigo series set in the UFO-blighted New Mexico, by the stellar (no pun intended) creative team of Paul Cornell and Ryan Kelly. There's also Bill Willingham's latest *Fables* ongoing, *Fairest #1*, which will explore the secret histories of the princesses and witches of the *Fables*-verse, with a first arc drawn by Phil Jimenez. In April, look for *Get Jiro!*, an original hardcover graphic novel, co-written by enfant



Daredevil fights old foes in 'Omega Effect'.



Hero warrior meets stupid warrior.



Peter Bagge's back with some dark SF.

The curse of the Silver Banshee has risen!

> **“ People will literally kill for a seat at the best restaurant ”**

terrible celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, set in a future where people will literally kill for a seat at the best restaurant.

INDEPENDENTS

Mark Millar fans are spoilt for choice this spring as comic-dom's most prolific creator-owned mogul releases *Supercrooks #1* (with Leinil Yu and *Kick-Ass* director Matthew Vaughn) in March, and *The Secret Service #1* (with *Watchmen* artist Dave Gibbons) in April, both through Marvel's Icon line.

At Image, Brian K Vaughan returns to comics with March's sci-fi/fantasy epic, *Saga #1*, while Jonathan Hickman starts a new ongoing series in *The Manhattan Projects #1* – guaranteed to contain some head-spinning diagrams.

The earliest issues of one of comics' creator-owned success stories return to print in *The Savage Dragon: Ultimate Collection Vol 1*, while Walking Dead fans won't want to miss *The Walking Dead: Cutting Room Floor Hardcover*, collecting unused plots, notes and artwork from the zombie-epic. Then in April, Jonathan Ross and Bryan Hitch make a joint return to comics with *America's Got Powers #1 & #2*. No prizes for guessing the premise, but with that team, it's bound to be worth reading.

Dark Horse brings the stars of the underground back to mainstream comics in April, with both *Reset #1* and *Groo Vs Conan #1* – the former a dark, psychological sci-fi tale from multiple Harvey-winning cartoonist, Peter Bagge, and the latter a comedic fantasy by Mark Evanier and Sergio Aragonés. Very different subject matter, but both are certain to be brilliant.

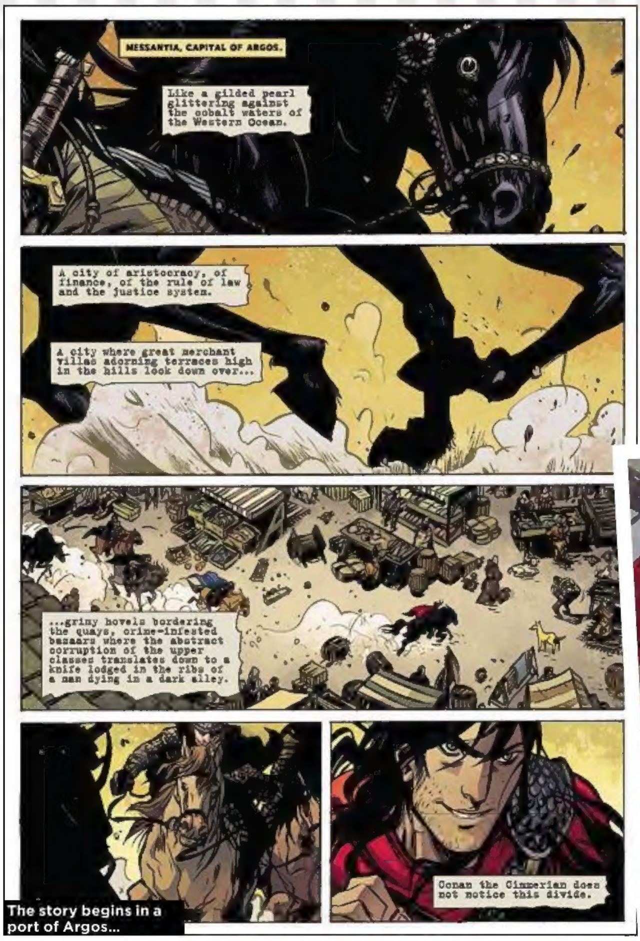
Finally, over at IDW, the second *Infestation* crossover runs amok, seeing the likes of GI Joe and the Turtles facing Lovecraftian demons in March's *Infestation 2: GI Joe #1 & #2* and *Infestation 2: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles #1 & #2*, before the story concludes in April's *Infestation 2 #2*. You've never seen Saturday Morning Cartoons like this... **CH**

INDIE SPOTLIGHT

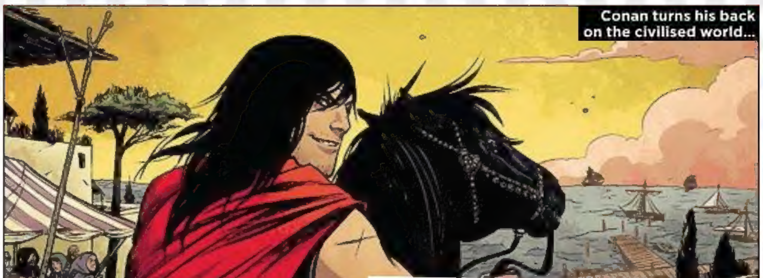
BRIAN WOOD
CHANNEL ZERO
THE COMPLETE COLLECTION
WITH BECKY CLOONAN
INTRODUCTION BY WARREN ELLIS

CHANNEL ZERO TPB

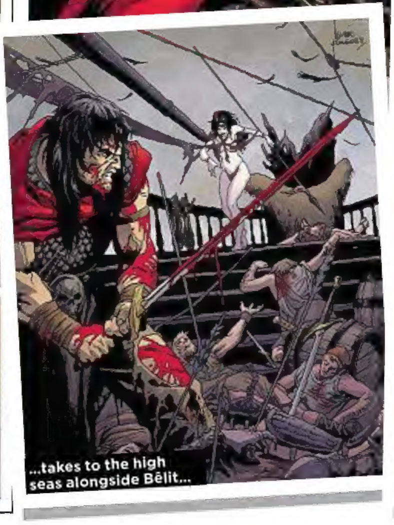
Written and drawn by Brian Wood, the original *Channel Zero* was a masterpiece, blending art, politics and design in a way that still feels fresh. Set in a repressive future that increasingly resembles our own, it's now more relevant than ever. This collection includes rarities and design material, as well as *Jennie One*, the prequel graphic novel drawn by Becky Cloonan. Find out where it all began for the award-winning writer of *DMZ*, *Demo* and *The Massive*. 300 pages, $19.99.


MESSANTIA, CAPITAL OF ARGOS.
Like a gilded pearl glittering against the cobalt waters of the Western Ocean.
A city of aristocracy, of finance, of the rule of law and the justice system.
A city where great merchant villas adorning terraces high in the hills look down over...
...grimy hovels bordering the quays, crime-infested bazaars where the abstract corruption of the upper classes translates down to a knife lodged in the ribs of a man dying in a dark alley.
Conan the Cimmerian does not notice this divide.

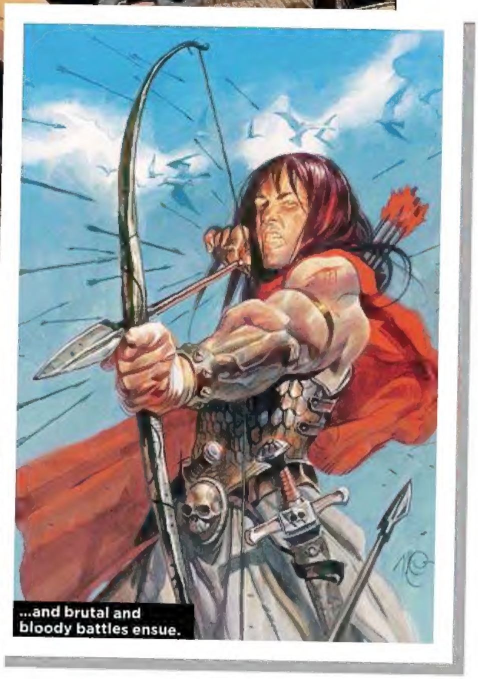
The story begins in a port of Argos...



Conan turns his back on the civilised world...



...takes to the high seas alongside Bêlit...



...and brutal and bloody battles ensue.

Young Barbarians In Dark Romance

Dark Horse and Brian Wood revisit a Conan classic

In 1934, Conan The Barbarian took to the high seas in the short story 'Queen Of The Black Coast', an adventure that introduced Conan's first love, Bêlit the She-Devil, and remains one of the most revered tales in the character's rich history. In February, Dark Horse launches a new Conan series with an adaptation of that classic swashbuckling saga, brought to the page by writer Brian Wood and artist Becky Cloonan. The fact that the tale is one of Conan's earliest adventures makes it all the more appealing for Wood. "It allows us to tell a different sort of Conan story than what I think most people imagine," he says. "Conan is younger, leaner, a little more mirth than melancholy, and nowhere near as experienced or jaded. That's an immensely more interesting sort of character than a grim and gritty type."

SHE-DEVIL

The original Robert E Howard story leaves plenty of room for expansion, but Wood knows he must balance invention with respect for the hero's well-established lore. "The heritage of Conan is incredibly important. For 80 years he's stayed vital and compelling, so a lighter touch is better than a heavier one.

> "They have a pretty interesting sex life – lots of S&M undertones"

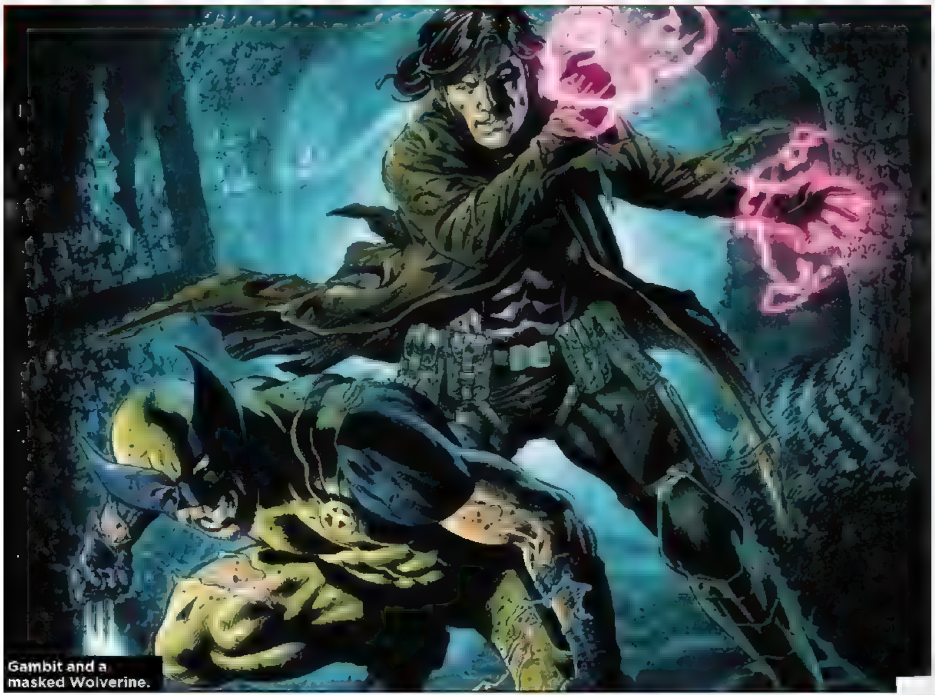
"This material is timeless as far as I'm concerned," he continues. "If I didn't already know when it was first published, I'd be pretty hard-pressed to tell you. There were two challenges: how to adapt it properly in a way that honours both mediums – the original prose and the comic book form; and how to turn a short story into 25-issues-worth of comics. Both are an ongoing concern; it's a steep learning curve."

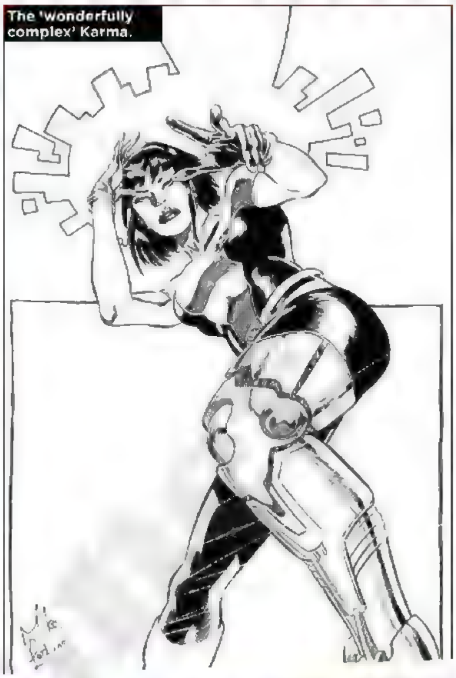
That said, attitudes to women have changed beyond all recognition since 1934. Is Bêlit truly a she-devil or just a career-minded woman driven to succeed?

"Looking at the original story there's a lot of stuff in there – not just about Bêlit – that wouldn't fly in today's world and I think Becky and I are pretty sensitive to that," says Wood. "I'm not changing a thing in terms of 'correcting' anything. I think with really subtle shifts in execution you can accomplish a lot.

"Bêlit's a she-devil, sure. She's this brutal person with a high body count and very little mercy. But you could say that about a lot of people in Conan's world. She and Conan meet with a really intense battle that sees dozens of men dead on both sides, and Conan and Bêlit's hands are equally bloody. Who's to judge? I think they have a pretty interesting sex life – lots of S&M undertones, which is proving to be a lot of fun to navigate." CH

Conan The Barbarian #1 is out now from Dark Horse and is reviewed on page 108.


Gambit and a masked Wolverine.


The 'wonderfully complex' Karma.

Tales To Astonish

A new creative team and line-up mean it's all change for the Astonishing X-Men

There is a changing of the guard coming on Marvel's *Astonishing X-Men*. Beginning with issue #48, Marjorie Liu (who wrote *Dark Wolverine* and *X-23*) and our very own Mike Perkins take over the reins of the series, with a new roster for starters.

"This team doesn't come together by choice, or plan," says Liu. "It's an accident of circumstance for some characters, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and being drawn into the fight."

"Cecilia is the voice of common sense," continues Liu. "She never wanted to be a superhero, but again and again finds herself drawn into that world. Northstar is totally arrogant, but his resolve is unmatched and fuelled by his underlying compassion. Karma, on the other hand, is too wary of her power over others to be arrogant. Because of the difficulties and tragedies that have occurred in her life, her main concern is helping people and, through that, healing her own old traumas."

In Northstar and Karma, the team includes two of the best-known gay and lesbian characters in mainstream comics. For the creators pulling their strings, the sexual orientation of the cast is not what defines them. "Yes, Northstar's sexuality is still worth exploring but we don't make it into some kind of huge statement, it's just part of what he is, like his mutant genome," says Perkins.

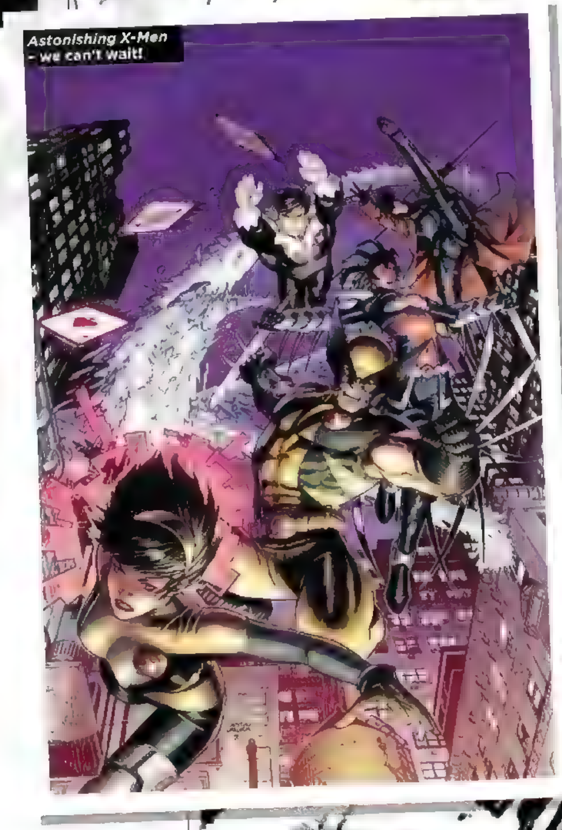
"Karma is a wonderfully complex character who has endured tremendous indignities," adds Liu. "And, as Mike said about Northstar, her sexuality is part of who she is. It's worth exploring in terms of her relationships – just as any relationship is worth exploring – but we're not going to hold a huge sign over her head and say, 'Here, we've come to the 'lesbian' portion of our story, ladies and gentlemen'."

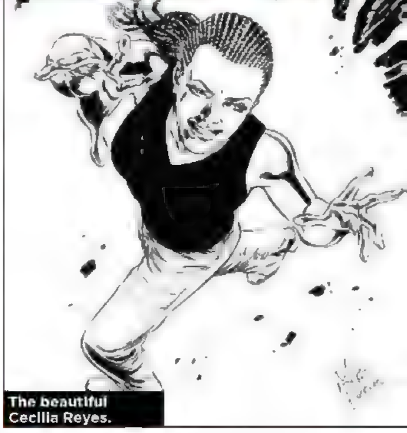
The first challenge facing the team will take the form of The Marauders. "They're so powerful and so mean!" gasps Liu.

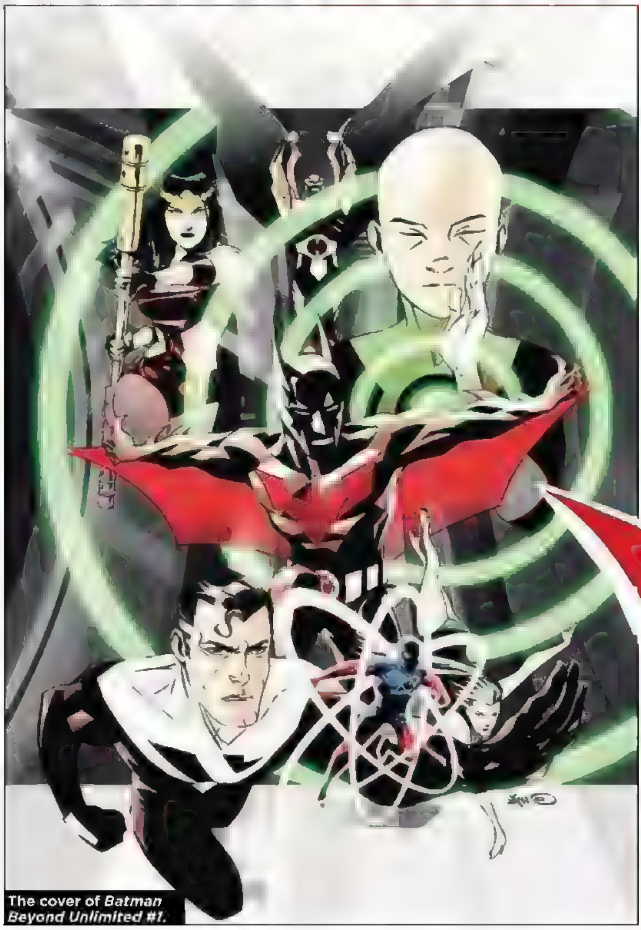
"You know when they show up that there's going to be blood. As for future challenges, I can't say very much. Just that this story will twist around in – hopefully – some very unexpected ways. The Marauders are not the only villains in this arc. Nor the worst." CH

Astonishing X-Men #48 will be out on 28 March.

> **"This story will twist around in some very unexpected ways"**

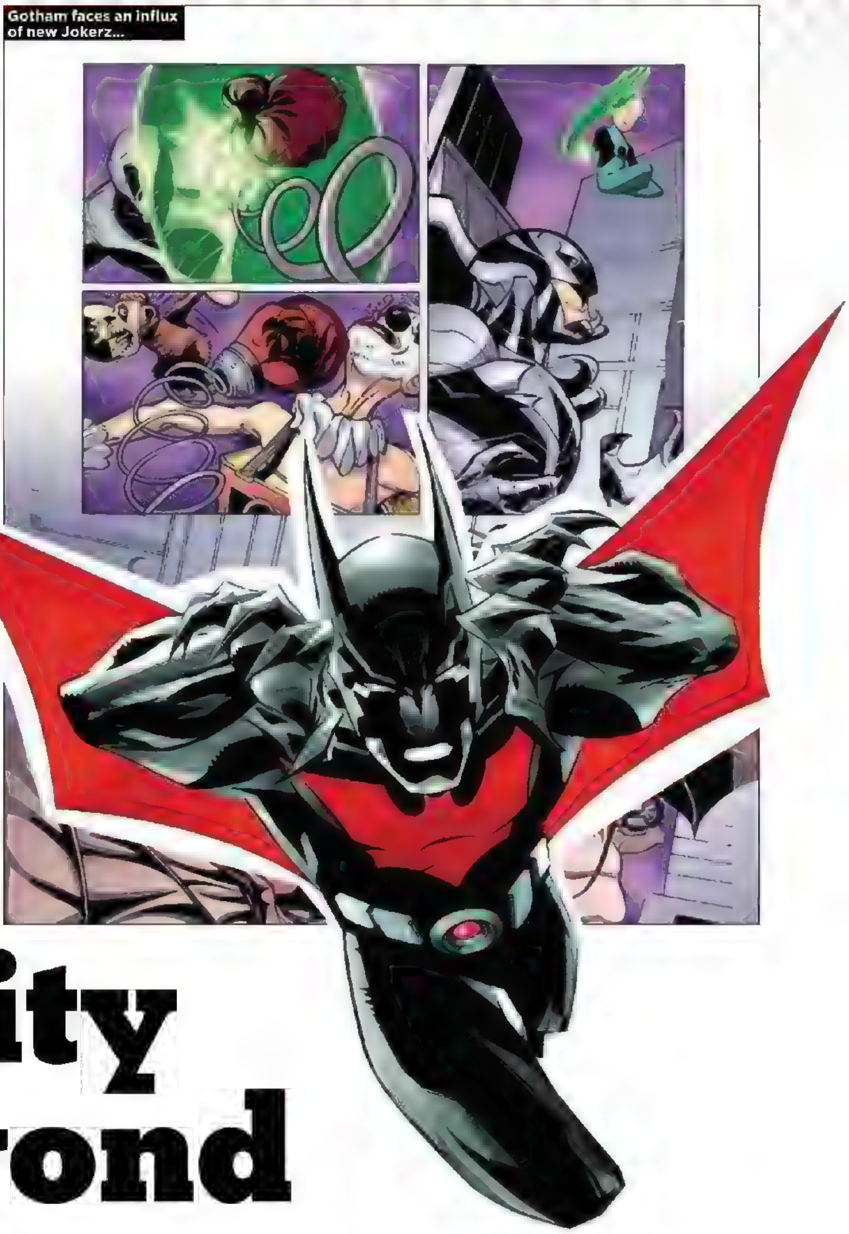

Astonishing X-Men – we can't wait!


The beautiful Cecilia Reyes.



The cover of *Batman Beyond Unlimited #1.*

Gotham faces an influx of new Jokerz...



To Infinity And Beyond

Batman and The Justice League go back to the future

Back in 1999, when it debuted, the *Batman Beyond* cartoon captured the imagination of Bat-fans. In its vision of the future, a retired Bruce Wayne acted as mentor to a new figure behind the cowl, Terry McGinnis. While the TV series wrapped up after three seasons, February brings the latest venture into the Beyond Universe with the first issue of *Batman Beyond Unlimited*. The comic, by Adam Beechen and Norm Breyfogle, chronicles Terry's solo adventures in Neo-Gotham, alongside *Justice League Beyond* by Dustin Nguyen and Derek Fridolfs.

> **“Working in the Beyond Universe is like having an open canvas”**

"From the second the last credit faded after the final episode of *Batman Beyond*, fans have clamoured for more, and they've been vocal about it – I know, because I was one of them!" says Beechen. "And the appetite everywhere for all things Batty hasn't diminished one bit in the years since the show was on air."

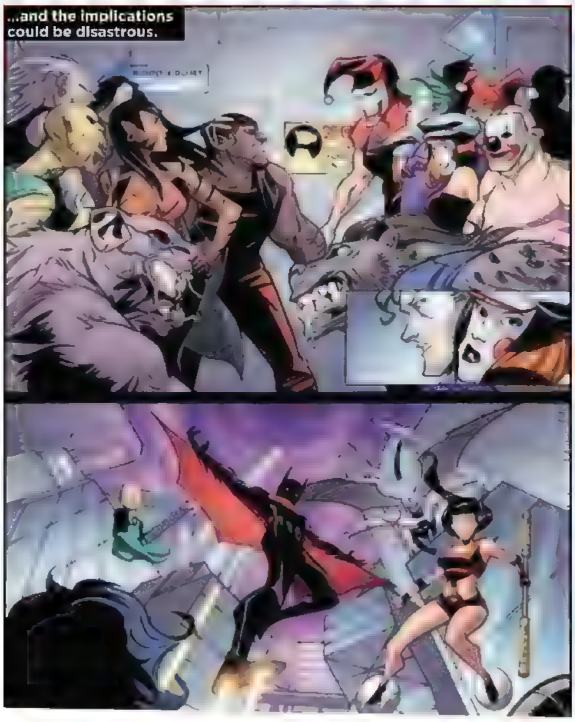
"I'm a HUGE fan of the WB animated shows that started with *Batman: The Animated Series*," adds Fridolfs. "I followed all of them religiously when they first aired. I ate this stuff up, and still pinch myself that over 10 years later, I'm now getting the chance to work in that universe."

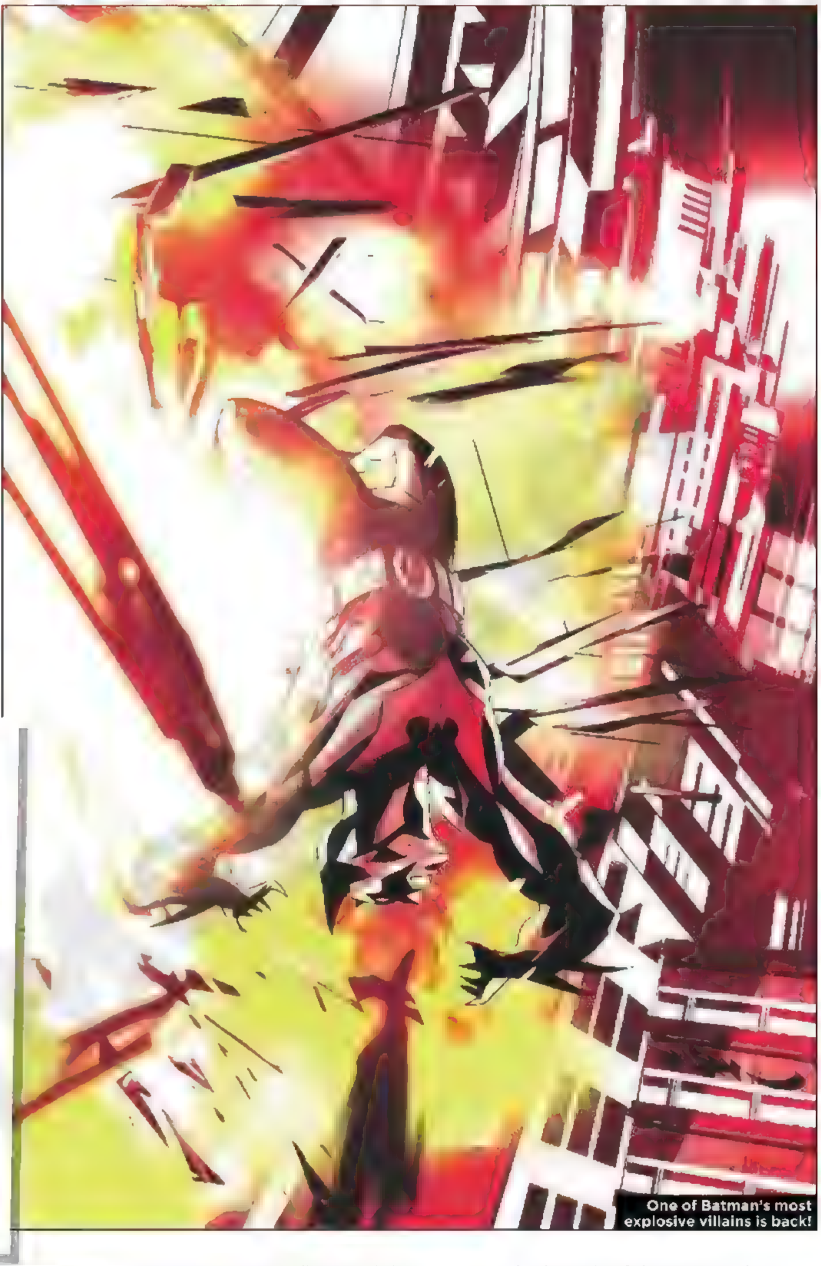
"I think working in the Beyond Universe is like having an open canvas," continues Fridolfs. "Where some creators get to work within certain boundaries inside most current comic universes, the Beyond Universe is still being written. It's a chance to explore new characters, new dynamics, and even new locations. We might start out in Neo Gotham and Metropolis, but there's a lot to explore outside those familiar areas."

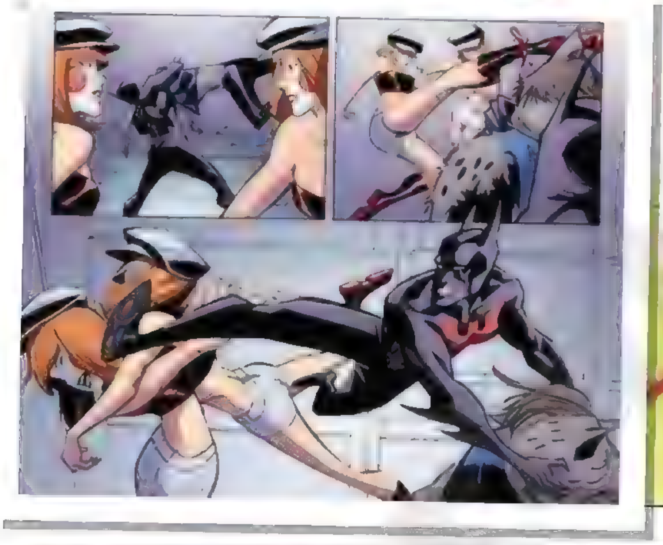
"No one's ever said this is 'the' definitive future of the DCU, any more than The Legion is, or Kamandi, or Frank Miller's *Dark Knight* books," adds Adam. "Lots of things might or might not happen in the time between current-day DCU and when *Batman Beyond* is supposed to take place that could lead to a world where Terry McGinnis takes up the mantle. That's yet to be seen. That leaves us in a place where we can pick and choose fun things that have already happened in 'official' DC continuity to include in our book. And we'll keep doing that, because it can generate stories and because it's a kick for us and hopefully the readers. The series of events we're really beholden to is the one established in the animated series."

BRUCEY BONUS

The line-up of *Justice League Beyond* will be modelled on the roster that appeared in the two episodes of 'The Call' story arc of


...and the implications could be disastrous.


One of Batman's most explosive villains is back!



> “ It's a chance to tackle lots of interesting back stories ”

Batman Beyond, namely Superman, Green Lantern (Kai-Ro), Barda, Warhawk, Aquagirl, Micron and Batman. "Of course, having Terry as part of the team means that Bruce [Wayne] will be involved, whether he likes it or not," says Fridolfs gleefully.

"Running concurrent with the first story arc on *Justice League Beyond*, will be *Beyond: Origins* chapters. This is a chance to focus on each member to see how they joined the team as well as where they came from. Our editor Ben Abernathy proposed it to us and it's such a great idea as it gives us a chance to tackle a lot of interesting back stories. And what's shown in each of those will tie in with things happening during the first arc of *Justice League Beyond*, as well as future stories. And to make it even cooler, each of those standalone chapters will have different artists drawing them."

DIGITAL FUTURE

Batman Beyond and *Justice League Beyond* share the unique distinction of being released first as weekly digital comics which are then collected in the monthly magazine. "The new format greatly impacts my storytelling and the way I work," says Nguyen. "Many of the books that are on the digital roster today are pre-published books, transferred to be read on an e-reader. Stories like *Justice League Beyond* and the *JLB Origins* are being illustrated using a format that will make stories told on such devices much more reader-friendly.

"Story-wise, the 10-page weekly chapters, rather than the usual 20 pages monthly, also required adjustment," continues Nguyen. "Derek and I tried our best to give the reader the four-colour rollercoaster ride they are used to, and of course, even though it's digital, it still all has to be drawn by hand, so we started *really* early to make sure nothing was delayed. I've just wrapped up the entire first 12 chapters, working with our stellar colourist and production guru Randy Mayor, to make sure it isn't anything less than awesome."

The launch of the New 52 last year took *Batman Beyond* off the shelves. Now that Terry returns to comics, Beechen wants to make sure new arrivals in the Beyond world know their way around.

"Our first issue will set the stage," says Beechen. "It'll remind everybody what's been going on, reintroduce key players and make new readers feel right at home.

"After that, there's a quick two-parter that brings back a much-asked-for *Batman Beyond* baddie. Issue four is one of our *Legends Of The Dark Knight* standalone issues that I'm really excited about. It re-tells how Terry came to wear the uniform from a very unexpected point of view, with some new revelations included that I hope will really knock readers over." **CH**

Batman Beyond Unlimited #1 *will hit stores on 29 February.*

Rob Power! Carlos Ezquerra! John Wagner! Mark Buckingham! Jes!

Noted SF novelist Guy Haley joins our comic heroes.

THE SFX WEEKENDER 3

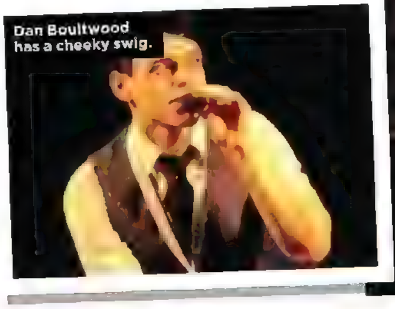
A weekend of wonder!

Photos by **Amy Swapp**

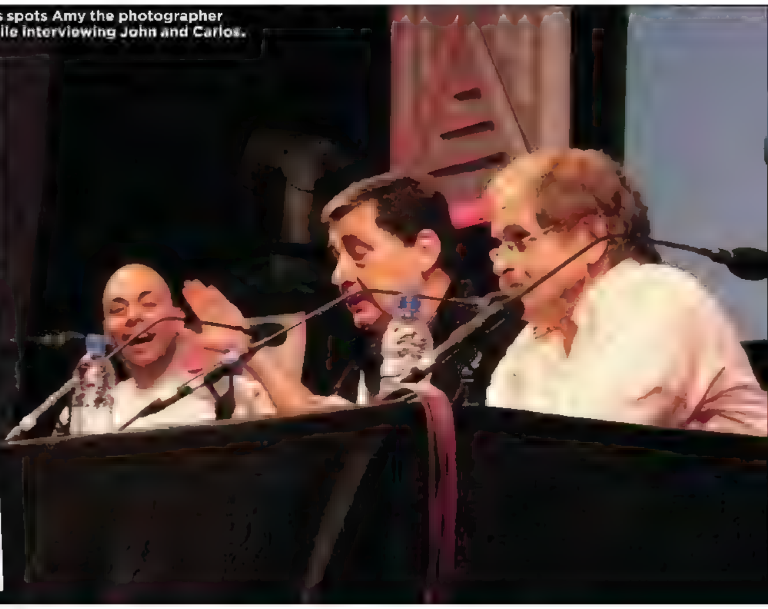
Earlier this month *Comic Heroes'* sister title *SFX* held the magnificent SFX Weekender 3 at Pontin's Prestatyn; from 2-5 February a cavalcade of SF stars descend on North Wales along with an incredible 4,000 punters for two days and three nights of genre brilliance.

Former Doctors Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy were among the stars – along with a larger-than-life Brian Blessed – but comics were well-represented too, with *Comic Heroes* editor Jes leading a live Q&A with *Judge Dredd* creators John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra (together again for the first time in years – their signing at the *2000 AD* stand was also massively popular, and they picked up a Lifetime Achievement gong at the SFX Awards).

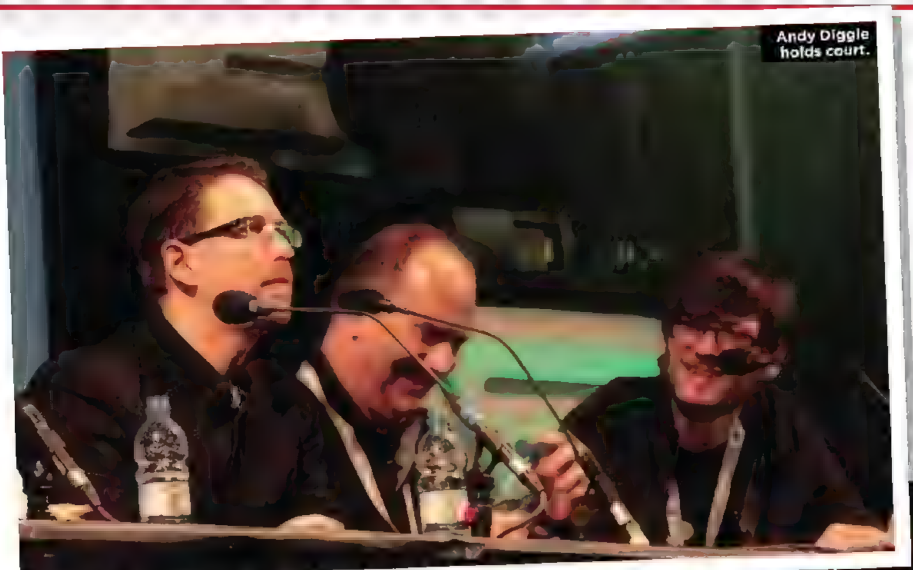
SFX and *Comic Heroes* wordsmith Rob Power also chaired a discussion on what makes British comics unique, in which Mark Buckingham, Tony Lee, Dan Boultwood, Al Ewing and former Tharg Andy Diggle flew the flag for Brit-strips in a lively and fascinating debate. It was a marvellous weekend and over all too soon; hope to see you next year at the SFX Weekender 4! CH



Dan Boultwood has a cheeky swig.



Jes spots Amy the photographer while interviewing John and Carlos.


Andy Diggle holds court.

A meeting of comic genius!

Tony Lee and Dan Boultwood created comics live on stage.

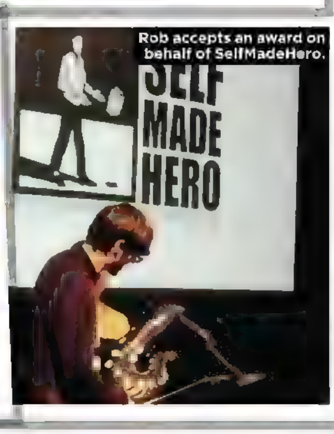
At the *2000 AD* 35th birthday bash.

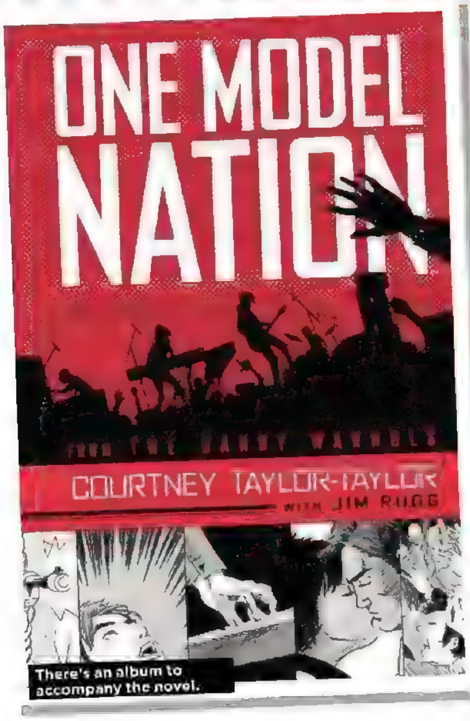
Dan Boultwood
Mark Buckingham
Andy Diggle (2000 AD)
Al Ewing (2000 AD)
Tony Lee
The 'What Makes British Comics Unique' panel.

John Wagner (2000 AD
Carlos Ezquerra (2000 A
The legends on stage!

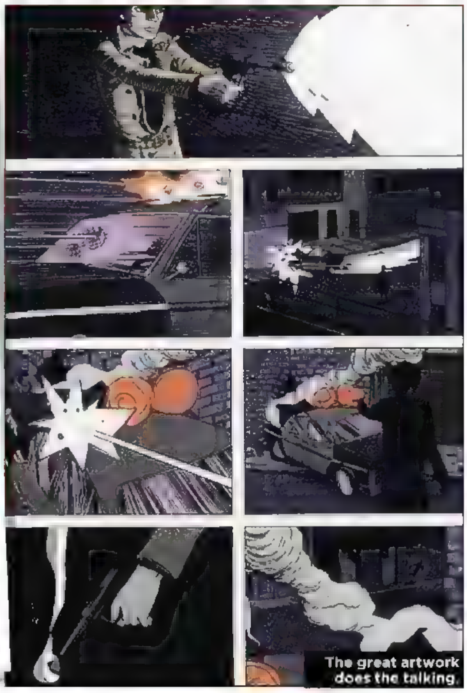
Our man Power gets accosted by Dredd.

Jes and *SFX*'s Jordan present the *2000 AD* birthday cake.

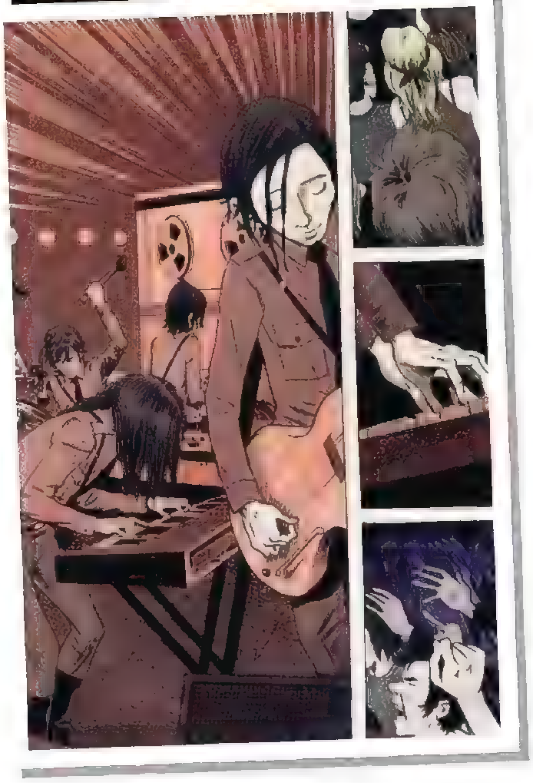

SELF MADE HERO
Rob accepts an award on behalf of SelfMadeHero.



There's an album to accompany the novel.



The great artwork does the talking.



The Road To Revolution

The Dandy Warhols' Courtney Taylor-Taylor talks about his new graphic novel

Ever since Kiss poured their blood into a Marvel comic in 1977, rock and comics have been comfortable bedfellows. Courtney Taylor-Taylor is the latest frontman to give it a go and the result – the excellent *One Model Nation*, set in seventies Berlin – is reviewed on page 110. Here he talks about what he believes is the most important thing he's ever done...

Comic Heroes: How difficult was it to transform the story you had in your head into panels of words and pictures on the page?

Courtney Taylor-Taylor: Nearly impossible. Maybe actually impossible. I had Joe Keating to do the main paraphrasing and visualising of it but still it's like going in face first. You just start the mayhem and then it's all damage control. You're constantly sculpting and reshaping and adapting right up to the 13th hour.

I'm told that this is why it's good to have deadlines – yeah, whatever. I was still manically revising on the Titan edition and stressing out like a nun at an English sheep farm.

CH: We were struck by your use of silence, which really lets the art and certain scenes breathe.

CTT: Thanks for noticing. Several years ago I was friends with Dr George Miller and we had many long discussions about what I call silence in cinema – incidentally, he'd intended *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* to be 'a story in pictures'. He told me that the day they were ready to shoot he looked at the shot list with the script and went 'where the hell did all this dialogue come from?' He'd fixed and amended it so many times that he didn't notice how far he'd gone. I was glad that story stuck with me when it came to making this book because the images are really more powerful and informative than most dialogue is. Action and reaction should move the thing along just fine. Faces can do the emotional work. And yeah, I didn't want any 'biffs', 'bangs' or 'pows' on Jim Rugg's images.

> **“It took me three years to write it and six more to make it not suck”**

CH: The use of Baader-Meinhof is inspired. Were you ever fearful of creating a fictionalised version of our world around them?

CTT: Thanks again, that was Donovan's idea. [Donovan Leitch, the tale's historian]. God, when he started unleashing that trip on me it all really started falling into place. The crazy stuff that actually happened and I could fit this band into as some sort of fulcrum? Are you kidding me? I couldn't believe it. I wasn't afraid of anything except my lack of ability. I had to keep my writing skill from getting in the way of this story. The story and the interlocking pieces that comprise it are so much bigger, huger, grander and more amazing than anything I could ever hope to come up with.

So I kept the Shakespeare line in mind the whole time: brevity is the soul of wit. I was sandwiched between Donno's reality and my own need to get sh*t off my chest, pass along any wisdom I've gathered in life – trying to make this giant metaphor for the actual life and times of my band, The Dandy Warhols, be real.

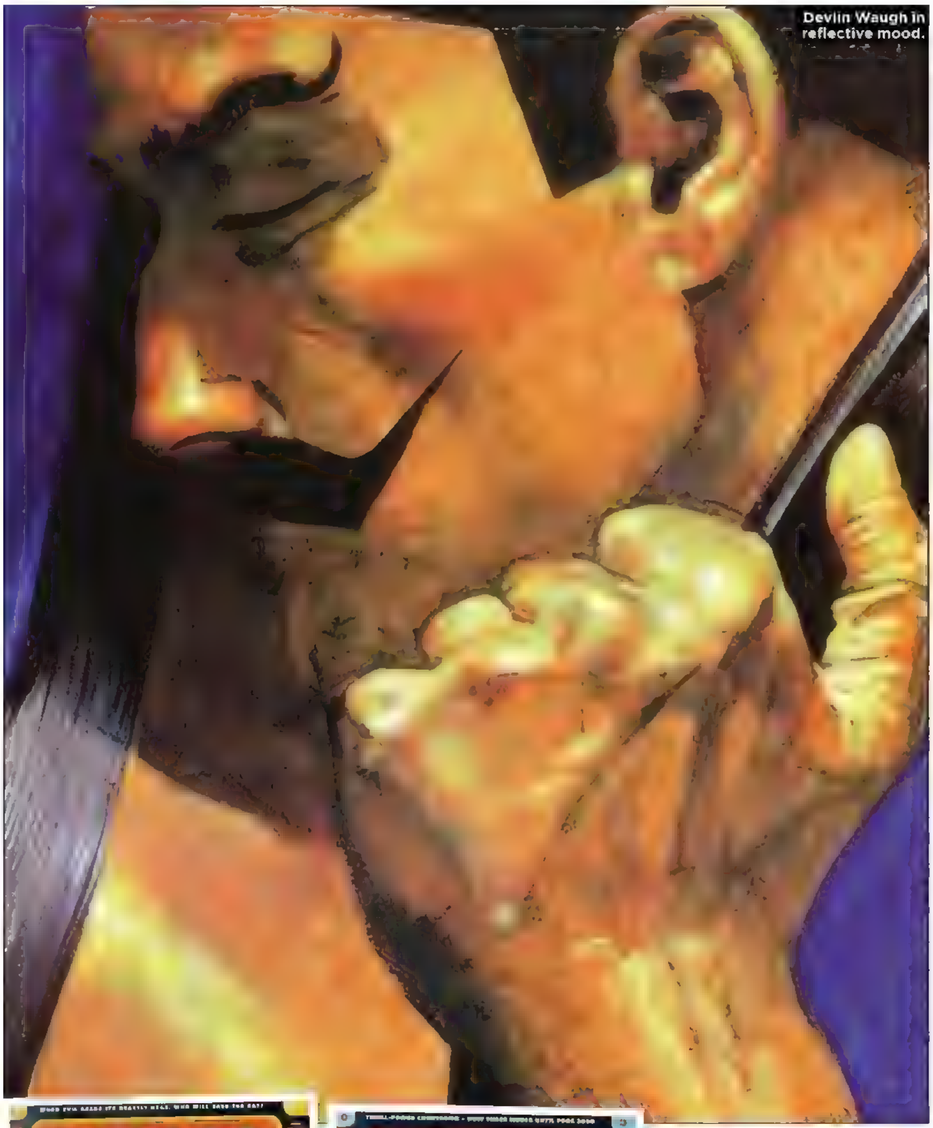
It took me three years to write it but it took me six more to make it not suck. I still wish I could've got a Steve Toltz or a Neal Stephenson to write it for me because it was super duper hard. But really, what isn't? **CH**

One Model Nation is out now from Titan Books, priced at £16.99, and is reviewed on page 110.

Photo © 2011 Jennstarr

THE VIEW FROM A BOARD

Artist **Mike Perkins** – soon to be seen on *Astonishing X-Men* now that he's wrapped up *The Stand* – waxes lyrical over John Smith...



Devlin Waugh in reflective mood.

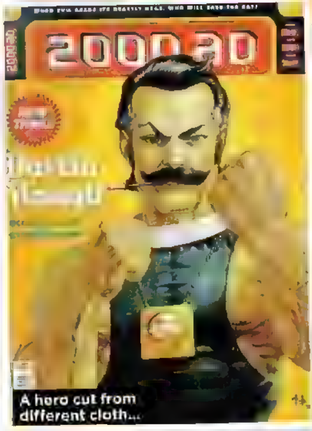
I'm fortunate enough to have an extensive collection of graphic novels and collected works sitting on my bookshelves and, every now and then, I'll have a particular hankering to re-read the works of a specific writer. Over the past few months I've gone through Dan Abnett's runs on *Sinister Dexter*, *The VCs*, *Kingdom*, *Durham Red* and the absolutely wonderful, recently published, *Insurrection* (Colin MacNeil, easily one of the finest artists of my generation, has surely outdone himself in these stories).

This was tempered by a need to read through Greg Rucka's *Queen & Country* run once again... just the comics. If I'd gone the whole gamut and devoured the novels too I'd never get any of my own work on the stands.

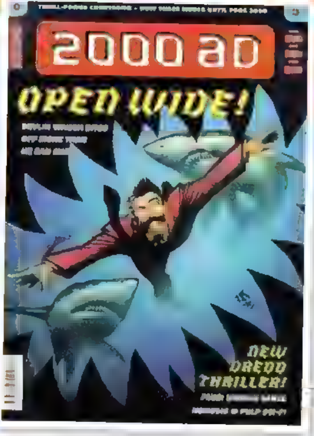
WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

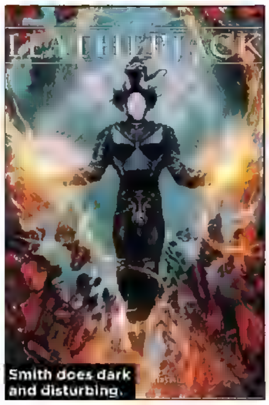
Most recently, though, inspired by the release of the collection of *2000 AD*'s *Cradlegrave*, I've been revisiting the wonderful – and sometimes mystifyingly confusing – writings of John Smith. This runs the gamut from *New Statesman* through to the aforementioned *Cradlegrave*, via *Killing Time* (and associated *Indigo Prime* stories), with stops at *Firekind*, *Leatherjack* and the so-utterly-bizarre-I-still-can't-get-my-head-around-it *Revere*.

Firekind itself is an absolutely wonderful story full of the best kind of invention that *2000 AD* can offer and I can't wait for Rebellion to collect it into an album format. (I have the *2000 AD Extreme Edition* it was collected in – which I love because it also contains the utterly-bonkers-but-gagging-for-a-big-screen-version serial *Slaughterbowl*). I also eagerly anticipate the day they decide to release a complete *Tyranny Rex* collection.



A hero cut from different cloth...


2000 AD
OPEN WIDE!
NEW DREDD THRILLER!



Smith does dark and disturbing.

Mr Smith's most accessible works are arguably the adventures featuring the Vatican vampire with impeccable taste in both art and blood – Mr Devlin Waugh. These are wonderfully dark and brutal sequential narratives, juxtaposed with an utterly charming, humorous lead that works so well in this flurry of stories accompanied by the cream of the artistic crop. The Devlin Waugh tales ably demonstrate the reasons I love John Smith's stories – much like the bio-wire in his *Rogue Trooper* 'Cinnabar' episodes (some of the best in the Genetic Infantryman's long-running series) his style and execution gets under your skin and stays there... bugging you long after you've finished the story. There's always a depth to the work which allows for further enjoyment whenever you wish to revisit the oeuvre in question – which, in my case, is often.

> **“ Smith's most accessible works are arguably the adventures of the Vatican vampire ”**

I've yet to track down copies of *Scarab* – the eight-issue series he wrote for Vertigo in the mid-'90s – and I'm always at a loss as to why we haven't seen more of his work in the States... although it's not something I overly ponder as this absence from the Marvel and DC universes enables us to experience more of his own singular visions. Visions that are so vivid they stay in your sight long after you've closed your eyes... CH

DARK KNIGHTS AND MEN OF STEEL:

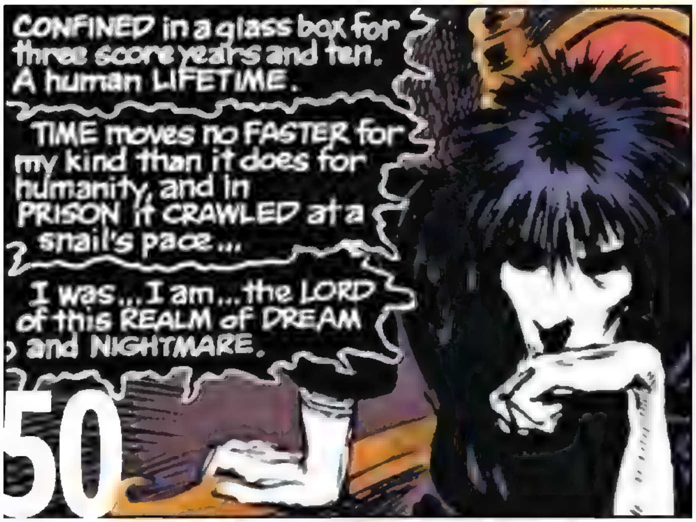
THE 50 GREATEST HEROES IN COMICS

From Bruce and Clark to Peter and Logan, the comics have thrown up a fine array of good guys – and the best of them can hold our attention for decades, says **Matt Bielby**

There are plenty of terrible comic book heroes – some are laughable or boring, many are one-note – but the guys that matter are fascinating creations, simple on the surface but endlessly layered, containing contradictions and tension enough to hold the mind not just for a single story, or even a year of stories, but for decade after decade. Jane Austen would struggle to tell another tale about Elizabeth Bennet, Charles Dickens had said all there's to say about Pip Pirrip by 1861, but the comic book heroes march on, something in their characters or abilities prompting adventure after adventure, encouraging revelation upon revelation.

This list is dominated by the great American superheroes, but they don't own it completely – Japanese, British and European comics are also represented, and while longevity is respected we've tried to keep the mix lively, allowing minor players with something genuinely interesting about them to beat out more established 'landfill superheroes'. In the main, heroes who started out in other media are barred, slots for members of big teams are rationed, and repetition is frowned upon; hence Green Arrow bars Hawkeye, while The Thing pushes out the rest of the FF. No, it's not fair – but these guys regularly fight The Joker and Doctor Doom. They're used to it.

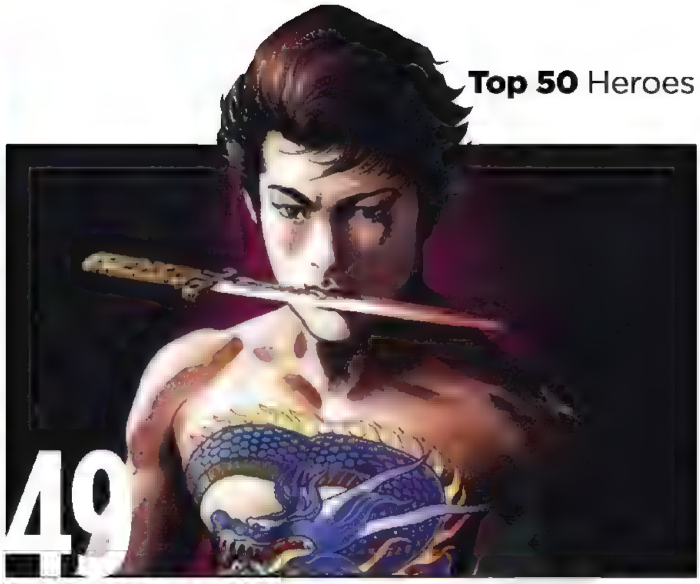
Superman image © DC Comics


CONFINED in a glass box for three score years and ten. A human LIFETIME.
TIME moves no FASTER for my kind than it does for humanity, and in PRISON it CRAWLED at a snail's pace...
I was... I am... the LORD of this REALM of DREAM and NIGHTMARE.

50

Dream/Morpheus (The Sandman)

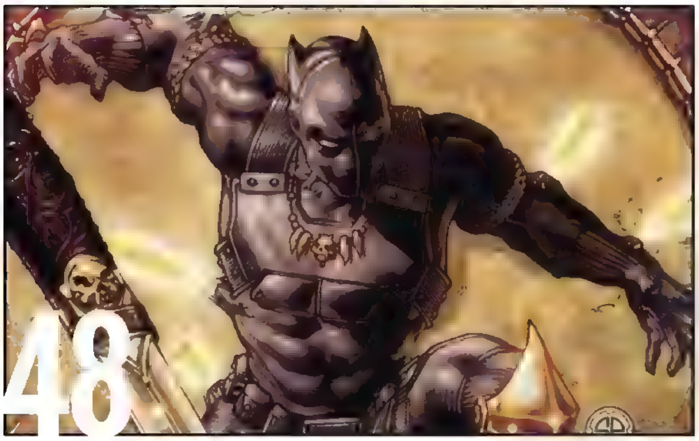
With his white skin and shaggy black hair, Morpheus (or Dream, as he is sometimes known) stands still while louder characters (notably Delirium and Death, two fellow members of The Endless) and assorted storytelling styles and genres revolve around him in intricate patterns. Self obsessed, excessively serious and slow to forgive, he is no traditional hero – but *Sandman* was no traditional comic.



49

Crying Freeman

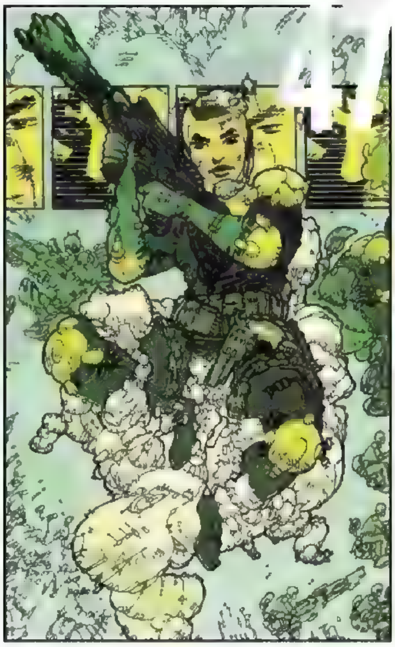
Japanese comics are full of tragic heroes in some way made to kill, but our favourite is this quiet potter, forced to become a tattooed yakuza assassin, one that sheds an uncontrollable tear each time he sends a victim to their gods. Freeman's adventures are a sort of *Kill Bill*/007 mash-up – but Ryoichi Ikegami's gorgeous art, and the belief in pure romance that runs through it, give Freeman a surprisingly wide appeal.



48

Black Panther

The first black superhero, the Black Panther had a wink in his naming (if Stan and Jack didn't know of the African-American revolutionary party also created in 1966, the coincidence is delicious) and a magical, unknowable quality to him: the super-powered king of a lost African jungle nation of Kirby super-science, he had a costume to match, all lithe muscle, everything the purest inky black.



47

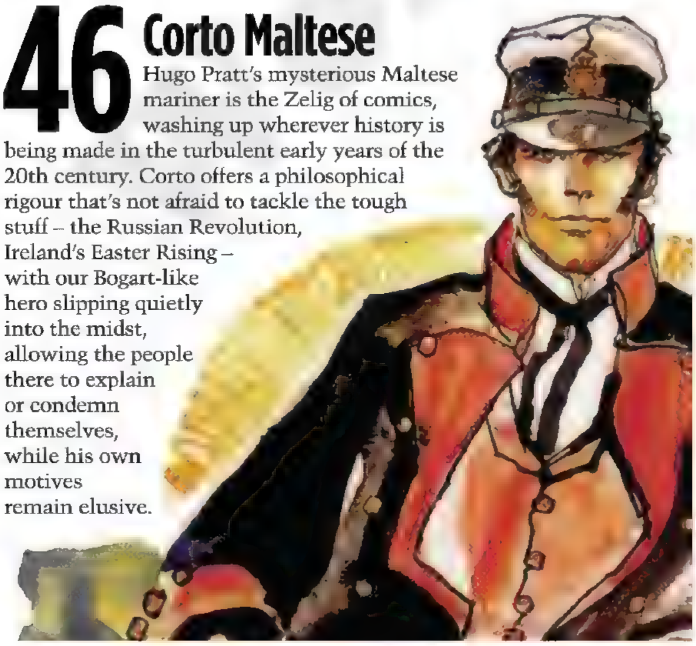
Casey McKenna (Ronin)

Misunderstood on release, and dismissed since as some necessary Moebius-meets-Lone-Wolf-and-Cub way-station on the route to full Millerhood, Frank Miller's sharp, brilliant SF dystopia *Ronin* increasingly looks like his most important, perhaps best, and certainly most ambitious work. Forget the titular samurai-alike – the real hero here is future-New York security chief Casey McKenna, hot and pragmatic, more human than most of Miller's violent cartoon goddesses, but just as capable. No whips, no sai: just 100 percent John McClane badass in Beyonce's body.

46

Corto Maltese

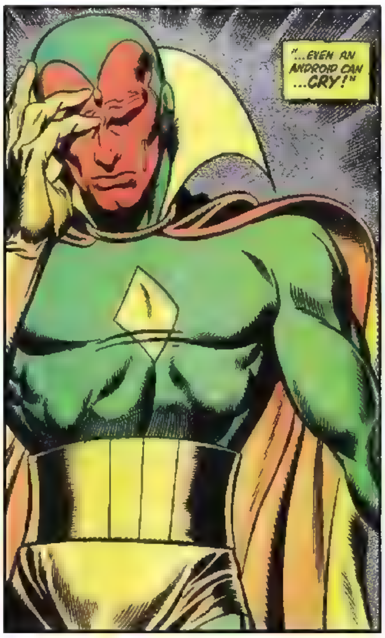
Hugo Pratt's mysterious Maltese mariner is the Zelig of comics, washing up wherever history is being made in the turbulent early years of the 20th century. Corto offers a philosophical rigour that's not afraid to tackle the tough stuff – the Russian Revolution, Ireland's Easter Rising – with our Bogart-like hero slipping quietly into the midst, allowing the people there to explain or condemn themselves, while his own motives remain elusive.



45

Vision

Roy Thomas hit his stride in the late '60s ramming *The Avengers* with rich meat indeed: whole pages quoting Shelley for the college crowd; mental breakdown and marriage collapse with Hank and Jan; and, in the middle of it all, Marvel's spock, a tragic, red-skinned android called Vision. He wasn't the first machine with human feelings, but Vision's Holden Caulfield-meets-*The Graduate* struggles with a plastic planet, in which he is the most inauthentic thing of all, brought a tear to the eye of every sensitive comic-reading teen: after all, "even an android can… cry!"


"...EVEN AN ANDROID CAN ...CRY!"

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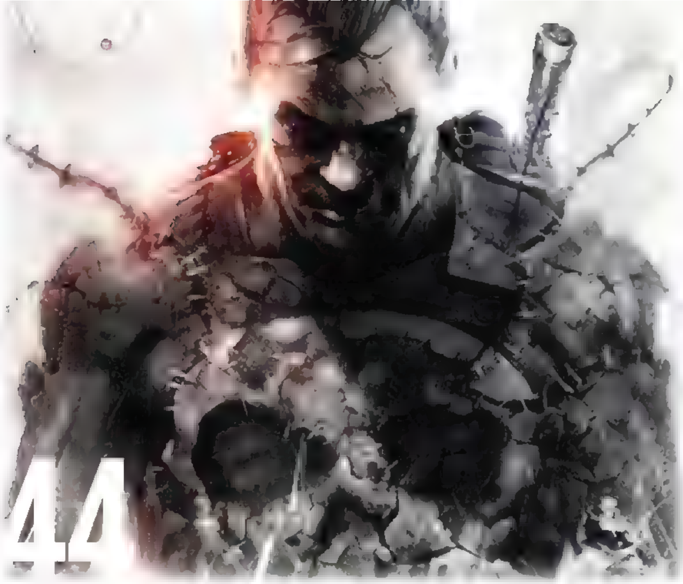
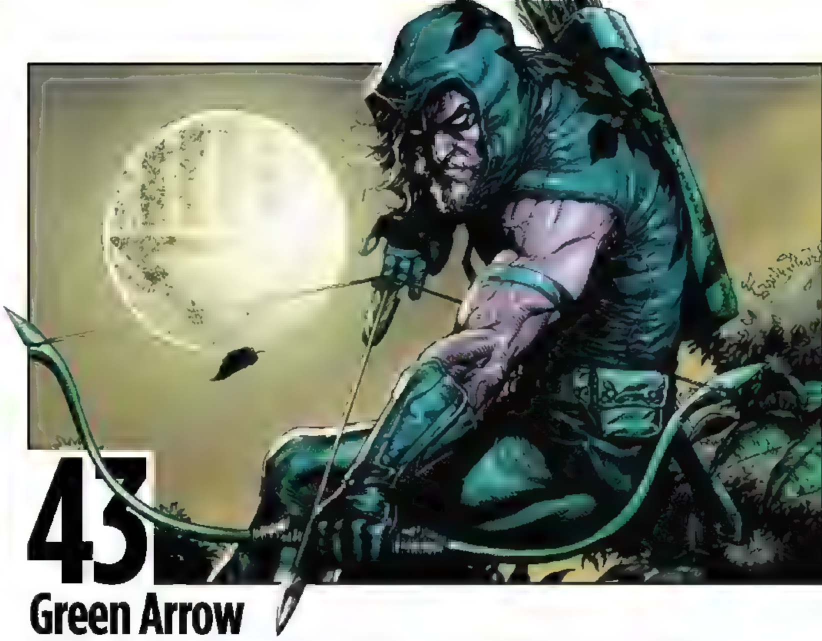


44

The Punisher

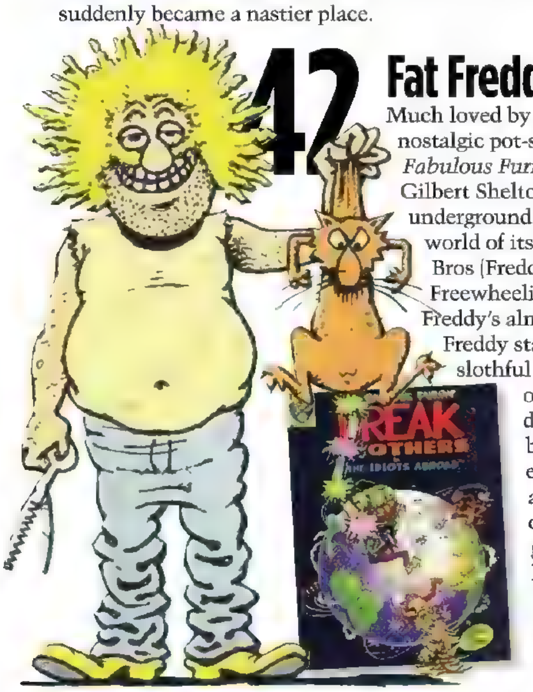
Gerry Conway's early-'70s *Spider-Man* vigilante – an ex-Marine avenging his gangster-murdered family with extreme ordinance – was Batman via *Taxi Driver*, a superheroic reworking of pulp paperback protagonists like The Executioner. The rage and helplessness of the regular Joe in America's collapsing cities was nailed, and comics suddenly became a nastier place.



43

Green Arrow

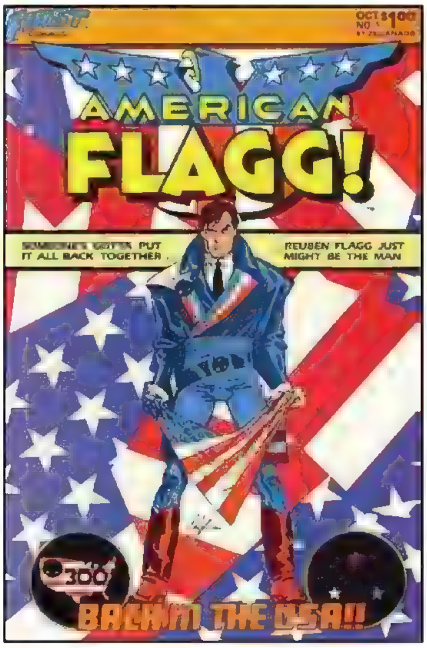
To a degree, Oliver Queen's place here is as stand-in for all those B-list DC heroes who've been around forever but no-one really loves: it could have been Aquaman or Martian Manhunter. What lifts Arrow above ho-hum crime-fighting superarchery is the left-wing, Robin Hood-esque indignation he was given at the start of the '70s, notably in the heavy-handed 'relevant' issues of *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* from #76 on.



42

Fat Freddy

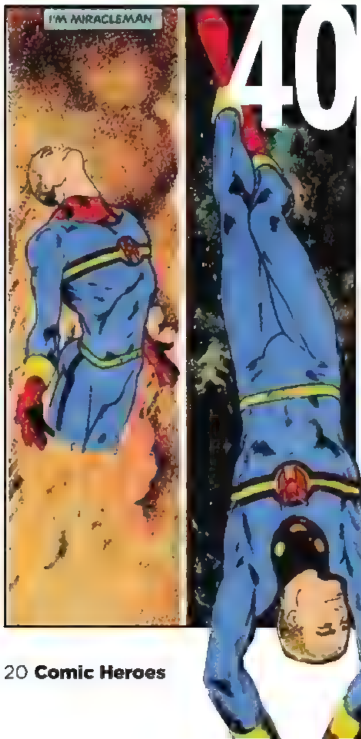
Much loved by generations of nostalgic pot-smokers, *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*, Gilbert Shelton's long-running underground comic, occupies a world of its own. There are three Bros (Freddy, Phineas and Freewheelin' Franklin, plus Freddy's almost-human cat – here Freddy stands for them all), slothful West Coast long-hairs on a constant trawl for dope, pussy and cop-baiting opportunities, equal part celebration and satire of the counterculture. Their globetrotting romps, like the infinitely re-readable 'Idiots Abroad', are a portal into an alternative comics universe.


OCT $1.00
NO. 1
AMERICAN FLAGG!
SOMEONE'S GOTTA PUT IT ALL BACK TOGETHER
REUBEN FLAGG JUST MIGHT BE THE MAN
BACK IN THE USA!!

41

Reuben Flagg

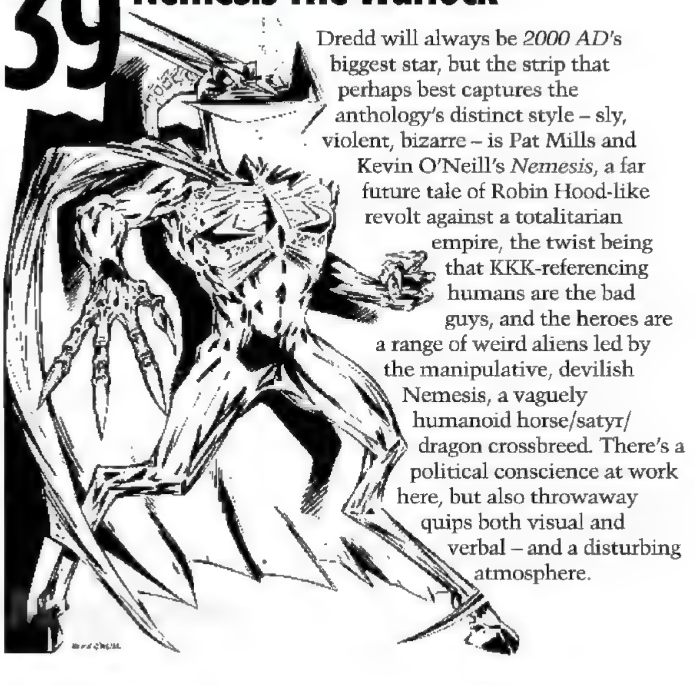
To a battered near-future America comes reject TV supercop Reuben Flagg. Good-looking, soft and scared, Flagg looks and acts just like every other Howard Chaykin hero – sometimes selfish, easy to underestimate, constantly horny – but occupies the writer/artist's best story, his most perfectly realised world. Unlike almost every other hero in this list, Flagg's libido isn't just fluff, but an essential part of character and plot.



40

Marvelman/ Miracleman

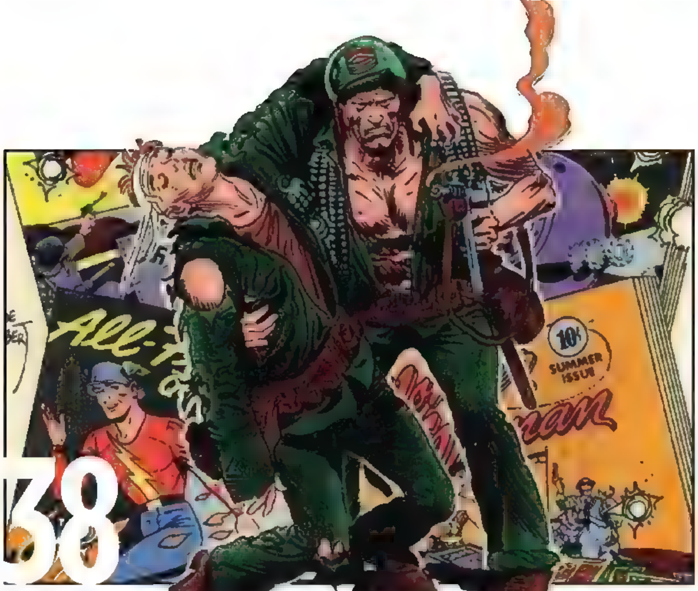
One of Alan Moore's first, most influential rebuilds was his radical take on '50s UK Captain Marvel-alike Marvelman, now shown to be a creation of science, not magic, the Cold War application of crashed alien technology to a small group of hapless orphans. Revelation piles up upon revelation, violence is occasionally extreme, and our hero becomes increasingly Godlike. The series began in *Warrior*, and was completed years later as standalone title *Miracleman* (thanks to threatened action from Marvel); art is inconsistent, but Marvelman is fascinating, petrifying and glorious.



39

Nemesis The Warlock

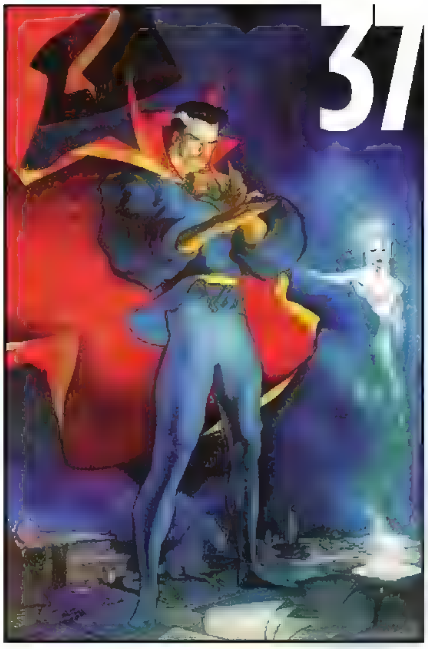
Dredd will always be *2000 AD*'s biggest star, but the strip that perhaps best captures the anthology's distinct style – sly, violent, bizarre – is Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill's *Nemesis*, a far future tale of Robin Hood-like revolt against a totalitarian empire, the twist being that KKK-referencing humans are the bad guys, and the heroes are a range of weird aliens led by the manipulative, devilish Nemesis, a vaguely humanoid horse/satyr/dragon crossbreed. There's a political conscience at work here, but also throwaway quips both visual and verbal – and a disturbing atmosphere.



38

Sgt Rock

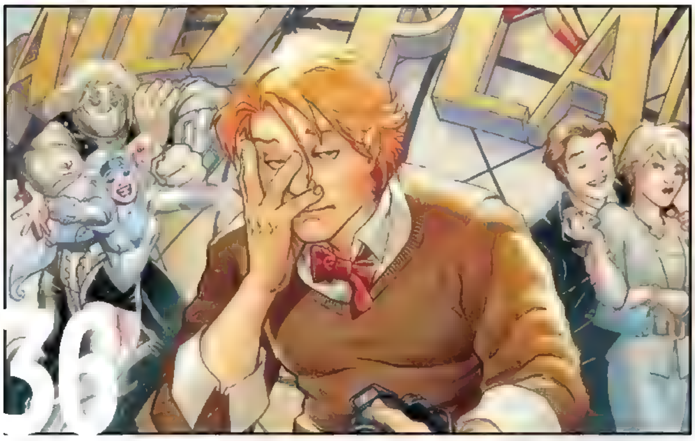
War comics are their own distinct, special world, and their most important hero is this one, star of DC's *Our Army At War* from the '50s to the late '70s, then into his own title. Tough but caring in the classic fashion, Sgt Rock led a colourful World War 2 platoon called Easy Company though stories, both grittily realistic and fantastically eccentric, under a number of quality creative hands.



37

Doctor Strange

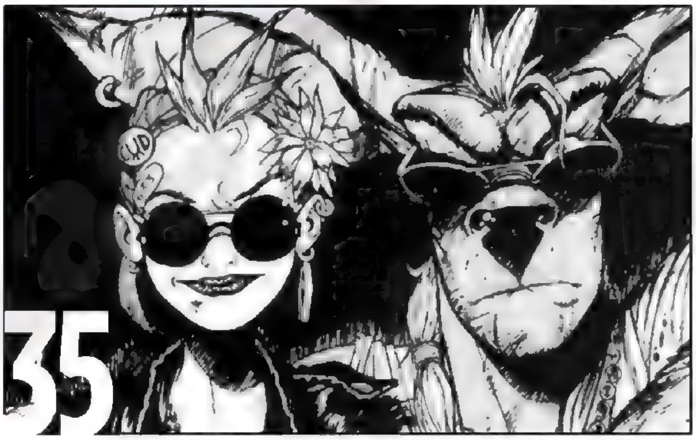
Stephen Strange was a cynical surgeon retrained as Earth's mystical protector against bizarre, acid-dream dimensions hidden from the eyes of normal men. Ditko's fantastical otherworlds were the show-stopper, but Lee's weirdo incantations ("by the all-seeing Eye of Agamotto…") kept pace; later stories, by Gene Colan and others, added sex appeal to the esoteric wildness. Too left-field for most comic fans, perhaps, Dr Strange remains the medium's premier should-have-been.



36

Jimmy Olsen

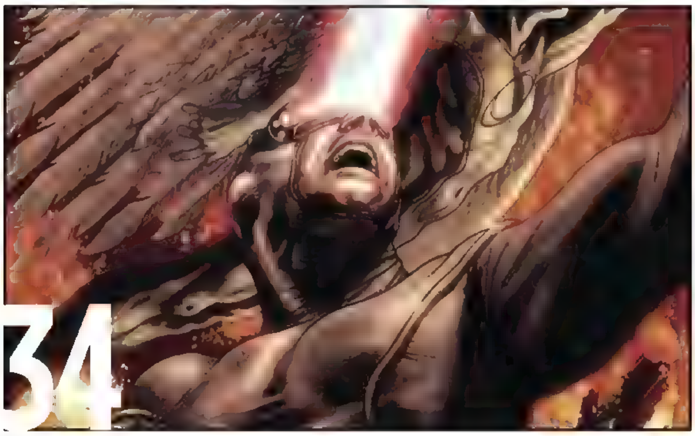
More than just 'Superman's Pal', the *Daily Planet*'s cub reporter headlined his own hit comic for 20 years, a red-haired American Tintin willing to don any disguise, indulge any trick or endure any transformation (into a giant turtle man! A human octopus!) to get his story. It's for remaining a household name, and proving a regular guy could headline a successful US comic, that he deserves his place here.



35

Tank Girl

This gleefully scruffy, booze-hounding, kangaroo-bonking, military vehicle-loving *Mad Max* reject was the late '90s star of *Deadline* comic and an ill-fated movie. Heroine to crusties, dykes, indie boys and feminists alike, her appeal was almost entirely driven by artist Jamie Hewlett's surreal, sexy, freewheeling imagination. In other hands she's fared poorly, but for a while she was comics' biggest star.



34

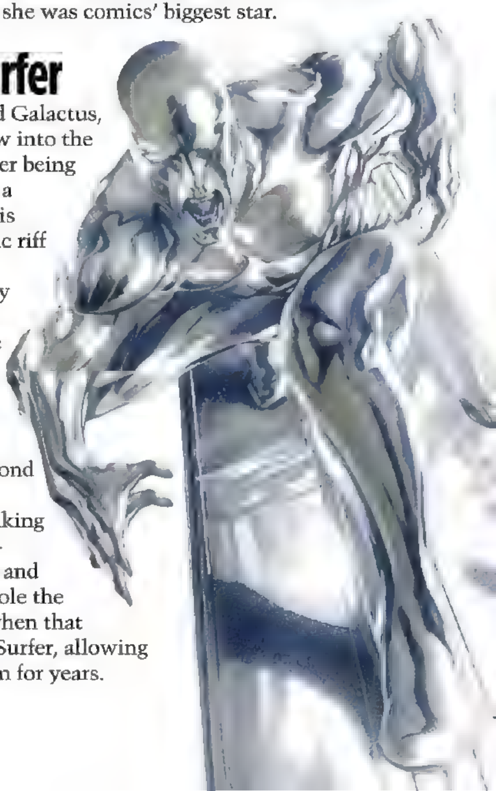
Cyclops

He's a tricky character to write well. In some hands he can come across as one-note – a button-lipped, ultra-serious brooder; under others he's the square-jawed action man, too conventionally alpha to convincingly lead Marvel's mutants. But at his best, Scott Summers can be a truly absorbing hero: human and handicapped, capable only through self-improvement, at the centre of Marvel's most celebrated love story.

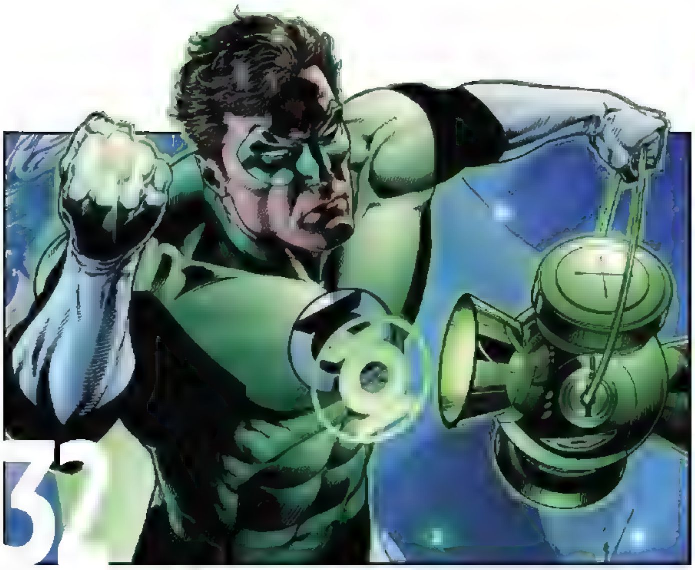
33

Silver Surfer

SILVER SURFER



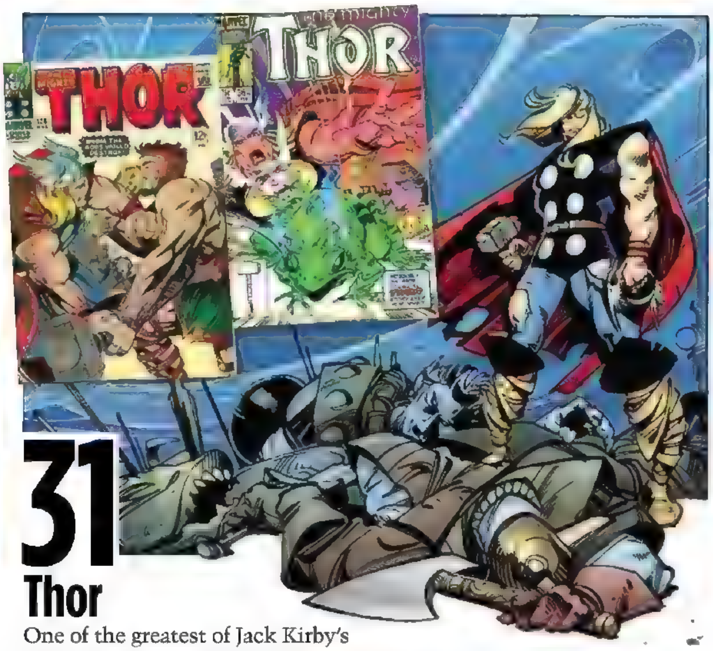
As he developed Galactus, Jack Kirby threw into the mix a sleek silver being sky-riding on a surfboard. This bizarre angelic riff on the contemporary surfing craze soon became Galactus' herald, then an initially-stunned Stan Lee's favourite new character – selfless, spiritual, tragic beyond anything Marvel had then offered (and they'd been milking tragedy quite a lot). A heart-wrenching solo strip by Lee and John Buscema effectively stole the character from Kirby, and when that failed, Lee quarantined the Surfer, allowing few others to work with him for years.



32

Green Lantern

Based on a magical '40s character, the 1959 reboot of *Green Lantern* introduced Hal Jordan – a daring test pilot with the looks of Paul Newman – as the first Earthman to become a member of the very SF Green Lantern Corps. DC's second Silver Age revival was a huge hit, but there's a key problem: few at modern DC know how to write a convincing Hal, an early '60s icon in the Don Draper mould.



31

Thor

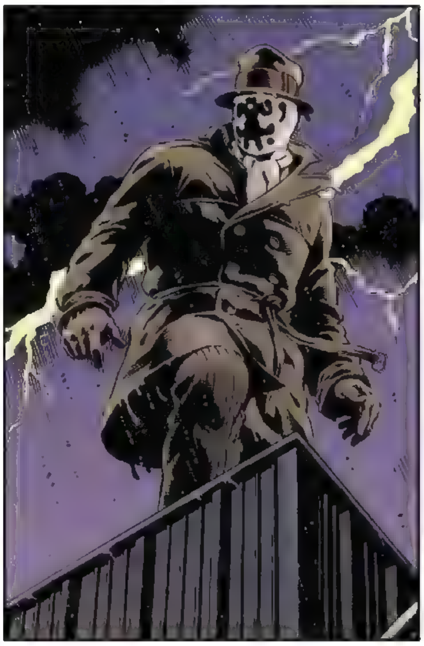
One of the greatest of Jack Kirby's oddball concepts was Thor, a Norse super-god, depicted as a Shakespeare-speaking Superman-alike in his Earthly adventures, but with a rich mythic background of trolls and frost giants to draw on. Thor's honest, noble (but easily-fooled) demeanor made him someone we cheered on and giggled at in equal measure.

30

Slaine

[illegible]

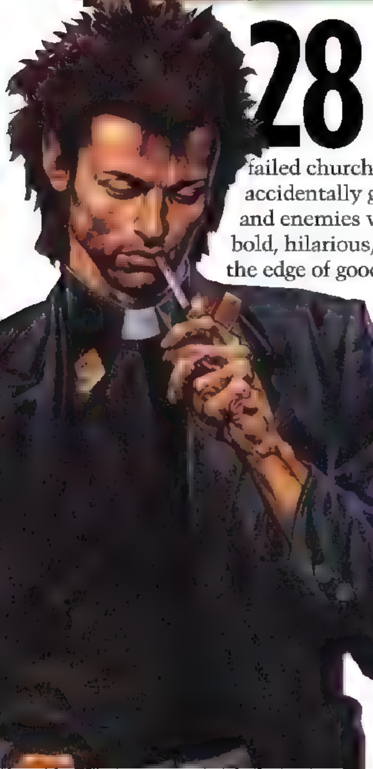
Slaine
Slaine



29

Rorschach

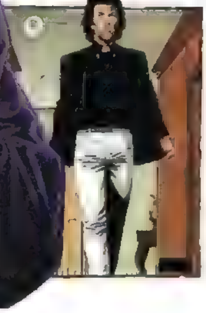
Watchmen had few traditional heroes but many fascinating characters, a fair few of whom deserve a place on this list. The guy everyone was talking about, however, was Rorschach – an ultra-violent vigilante with his black-and-white value set written across his face, a blank white mask with his namesake's ink blot shapes moving across it but never blurring into shades of grey.

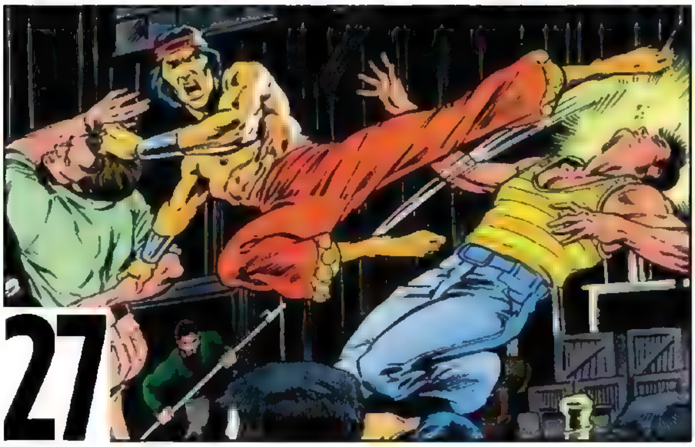


28

Jesse Custer

Running for five years in the late '90s, Garth Ennis' *Preacher* – a Tarantino-esque road story about a failed churchman in rural Texas who becomes accidentally gifted with divine power, and the friends and enemies who want to make something of it – was bold, hilarious, ultra-violent and gleefully danced on the edge of good taste; a heady mixture made more potent by artist Steve Dillon's deadpan, nuanced storytelling. It was a career high for both creators, an HBO show on paper, and at its centre, Jesse Custer was moral, old-fashioned, often brutalized, and endlessly engaging a Western hero of the modern world.

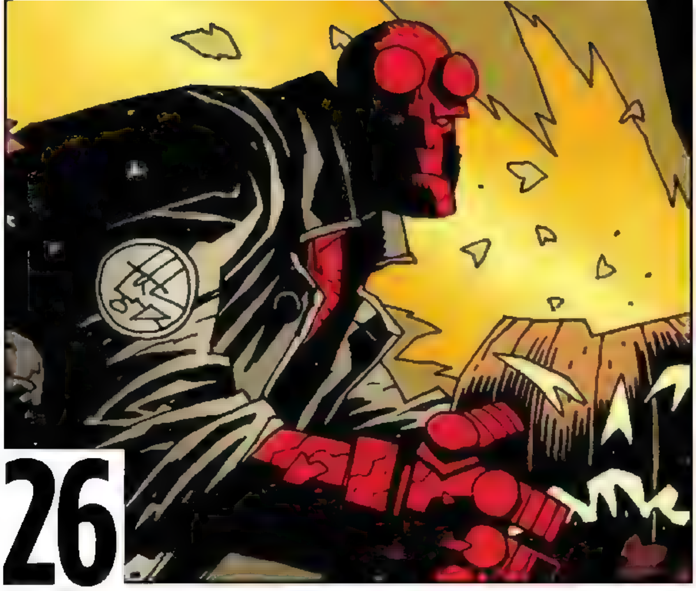




27

Shang-Chi

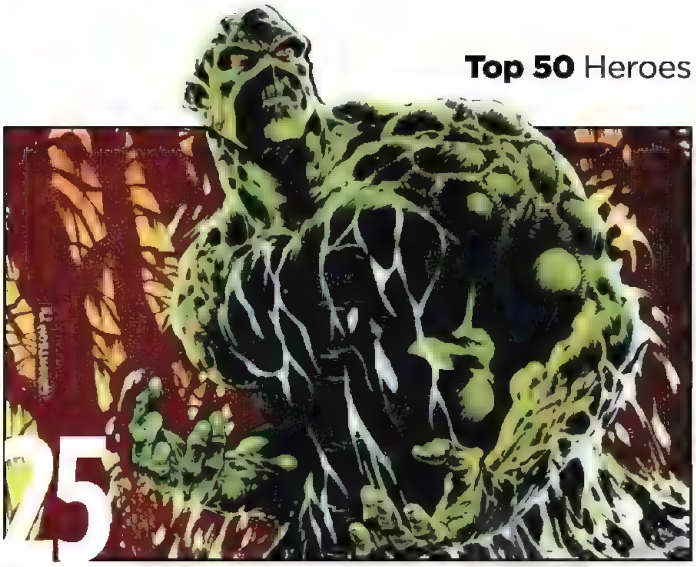
Few copycats beat the original, but it's the case with Marvel's top-notch 1972 effort *The Hands Of Shang-Chi, Master Of Kung Fu. Shang-Chi* had great, stylised art, Marvel poetry to its writing, and a truly compelling hero: humble, soulful, almost supernaturally capable. It was groundbreaking stuff, for many years Marvel's best comic; that legal issues prevent graphic novel collections is a minor tragedy.



26

Hellboy

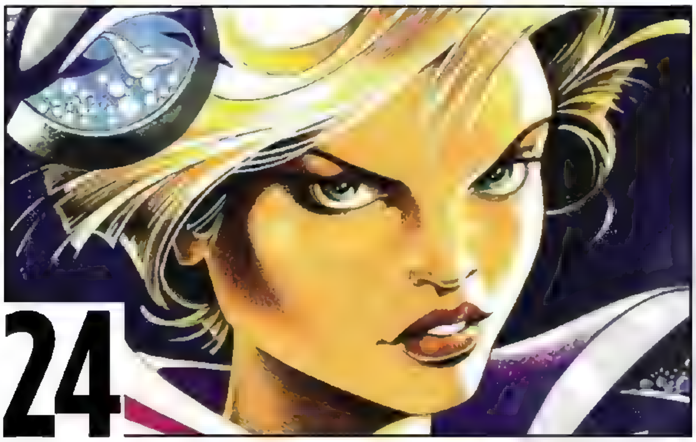
Mike Mignola's Hellboy is a demon baby summoned by Nazis and raised by Americans who grows into a gruff secret agent with a tail, red skin, sawn-off horns and a massive stone right hand. His adventures, rendered in Mignola's distinctive, heavily-shadowed art, are heavy on the folklore and Lovecraftian horror, beautifully told and rendered. Two films in, he might be American comics' best-known creator-owned hero.



25

Swamp Thing

Early Swamp Thing stories are best remembered for their moody Bernie Wrightson visuals; it's thanks to the Alan Moore run of the early '80s that the character is held in such regard. Moore changed everything by reinventing his hero as an Earth elemental and throwing him into 40-something issues of gothic horror, inventive SF, clever genre twists and one of the most touching, intriguing love stories in comics.



24

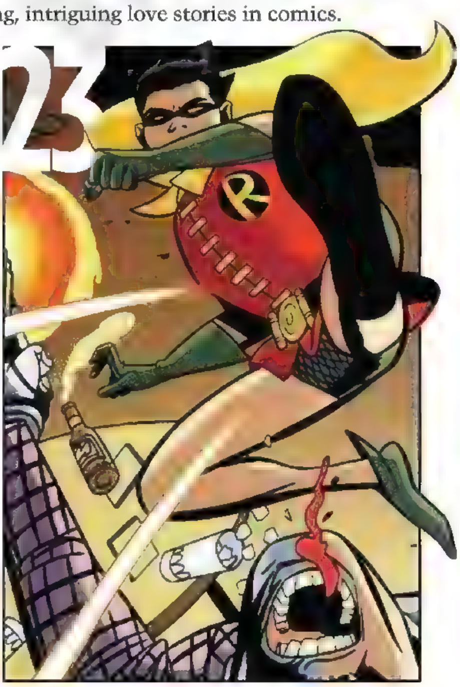
Halo Jones

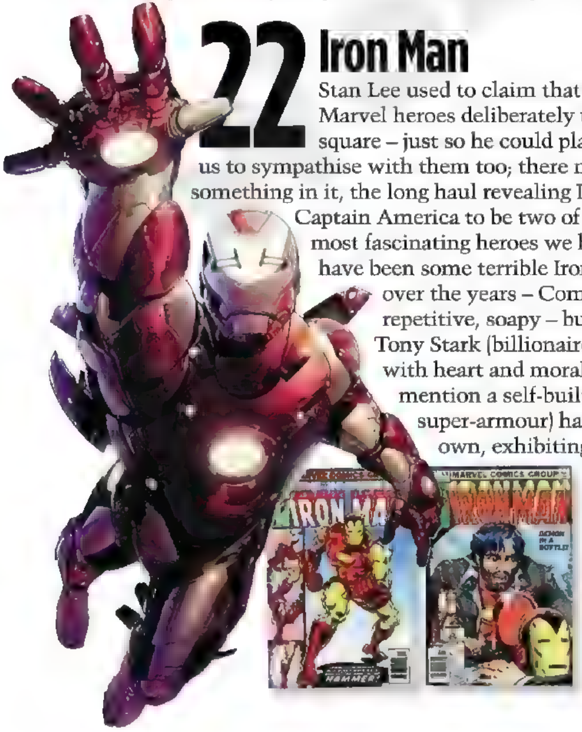
There are plenty of superheroines, but few great female comic book characters. Enter Halo Jones, a bored, naive mall rat from the future who wants more than her friends do, and seeks it by going into space, working as a waitress and a soldier, and eventually – perhaps – finding herself. Poignant and cheeky, this short-lived '80s Alan Moore/Ian Gibson strip remains perhaps the best 'Girl's Strip' we know.

23

Robin

The first Robin, Dick Grayson, appeared just a year into Batman's adventures, a capering, orphaned ex-circus acrobat designed to add light and fun to Batman's world, provide our hero with someone to talk to, and give younger kids someone to identify with – he was an immediate hit, and the comic's sales doubled. Much loathed by a vocal fan minority that likes its Batman ultra-gritty, and much joked about by just about everyone, no Robin incarnation will be everyone's cup of tea – but his importance is undeniable.

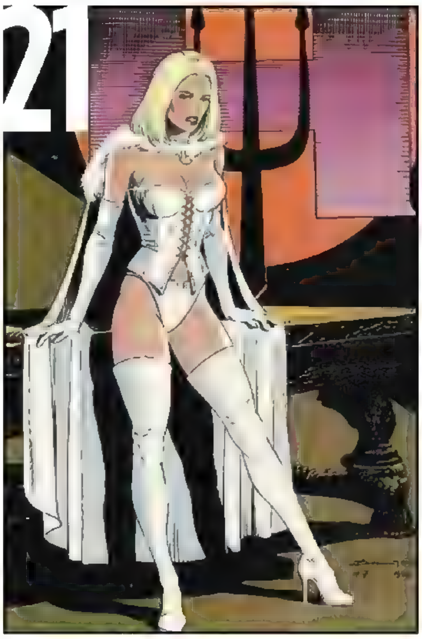




22

Iron Man

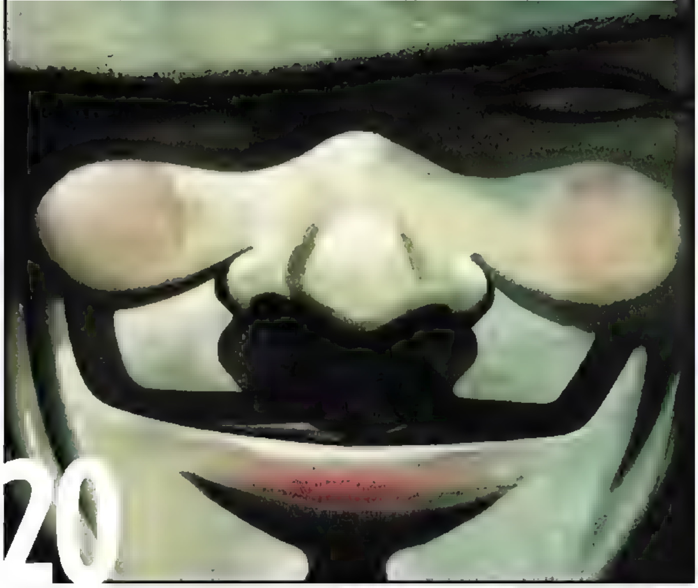
Stan Lee used to claim that he made two Marvel heroes deliberately uncool – older, square – just so he could play with us, force us to sympathise with them too; there may even be something in it, the long haul revealing Iron Man and Captain America to be two of the richest, most fascinating heroes we have. Sure, there have been some terrible Iron Man comics over the years – Commie-bating, repetitive, soapy – but in recent years Tony Stark (billionaire industrialist with heart and morality issues, not to mention a self-built suit of super-armour) has come into his own, exhibiting enough wit, brains, humanity, weakness and grand design to put him at the centre of everything in the Marvel U.



21

Emma Frost

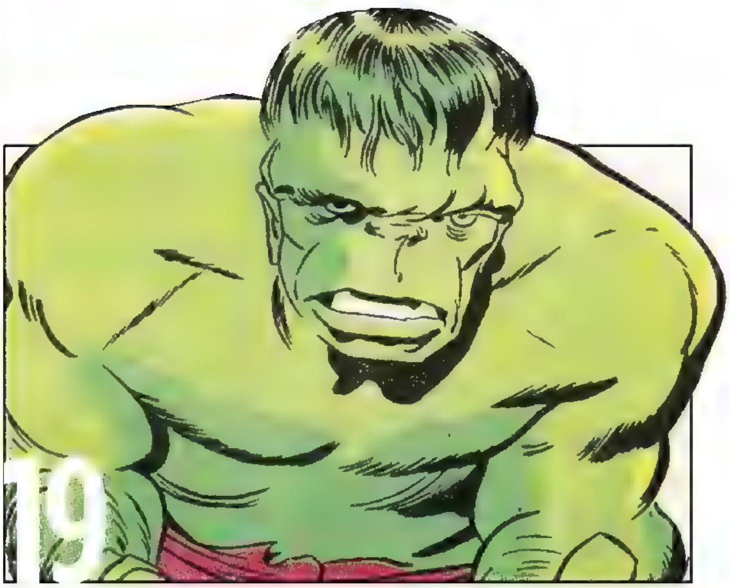
Edgy heroes are all the rage, but Emma shows them how it's done: be posh, gorgeous, snooty, snarky, ruthlessly effective – and keep them guessing as to what your true motives really are. Initially introduced as highly-sexed villain The White Queen in Claremont/Byrne's *X-Men* – bondage dominatrix meets wedding night bride – she was powerful fare from the start. As a heroine she's even better, perfect for the X-Men's 'outlaw hero' vibe, and rarely anything less than the most fascinating character in any scene.



20

V (for Vendetta)

V's power comes from his purity – Alan Moore's Guy Fawkes-obsessed anarchist, fighting a dystopian, fascist near-future Britain (70 percent Orwell/20 percent Thatch/10 percent *Cabaret*) got in, did his business, and got out, initially in stark David Lloyd-illustrated black-and-white in *Warrior*, and latterly in drab watercolours. Some feel it's Moore's best work, many of them camped out at Wall Street and St Paul's.

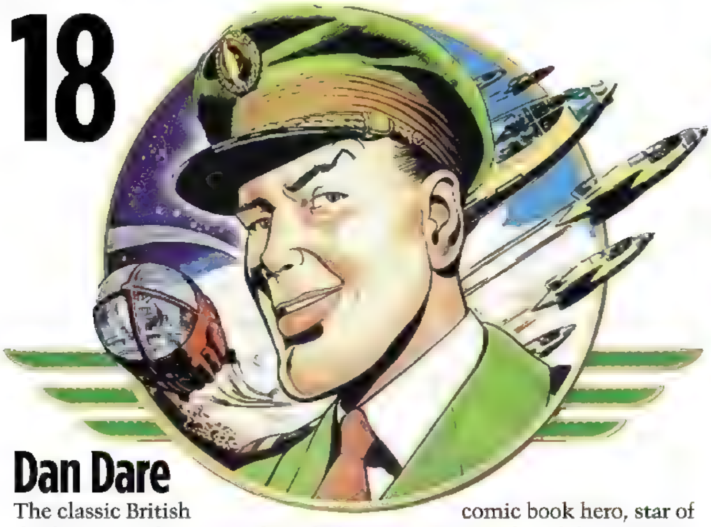


19

Hulk

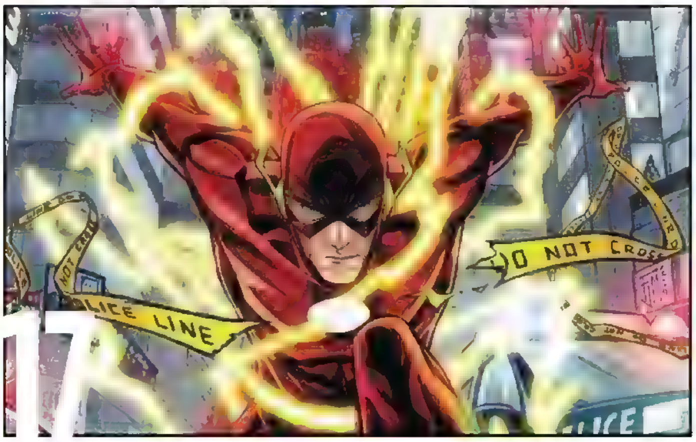
His comics have hardly been universally sound, but Hulk endures: a tragic, super-strong, (mostly) green monster in the Jekyll/Hyde style. Hulk is simple but basically good, and mostly wants to be left alone, but stupid people won't allow it – later variations have had him vengeful or intelligent or whatever, but these are only ever intriguing for a time. Poignant, injured, alienated – that's when Hulk's at his best.

18



Dan Dare

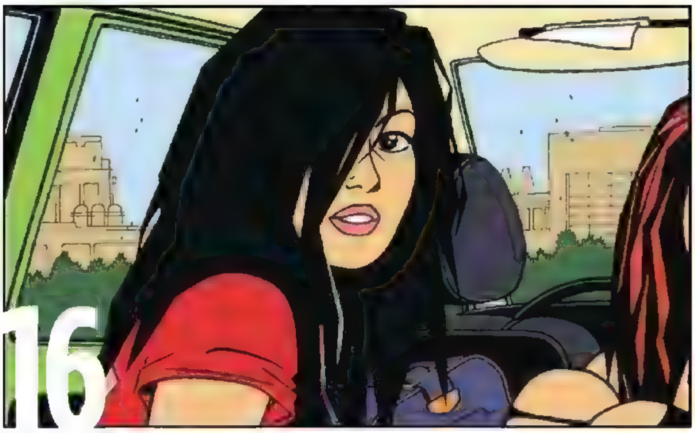
The classic British comic book hero, star of the famous early '50s *Eagle* anthology, Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future transferred a Battle of Britain charm to exquisitely detailed, gloriously illustrated space adventures set in the far future of the 1990s. Dare may look like a throwback to Empire, but he starred in long, complex tales full of plausible science and with a Christian, liberal sensibility.



17

The Flash

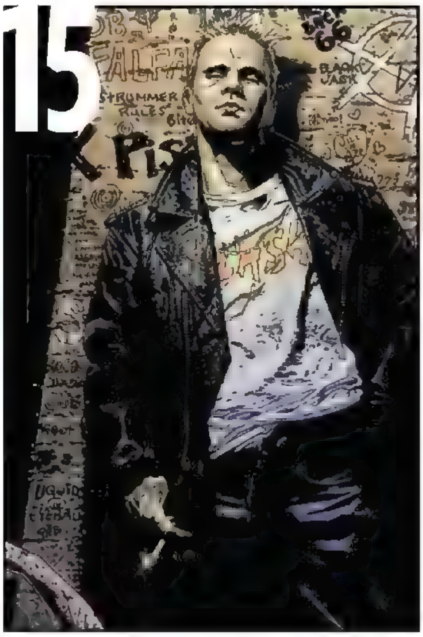
The Flash wears red and runs incredibly fast – it's a simple concept, but an enduring one. Consistently likable, frequently inventive, Flash has occasionally been the most vital character in comics: not least in 1956, when DC's reinvented Allen version of the Golden Age character kick-started comics' Silver Age.



16

Maggie (Love And Rockets)

Time has proved Jamie Hernandez's women more real and lovable than even the X-Men's: in 'Mechan-X', Maggie was a young, curvy Latina girl whose realistically developed LA-backwater life mixed happily with spaceships and dinosaurs. Soon, however, the strip would be renamed 'Hoppers 13' while Maggie would put on weight, turn bisexual, and become the still centre of a brilliantly quirky, engaging soap opera.

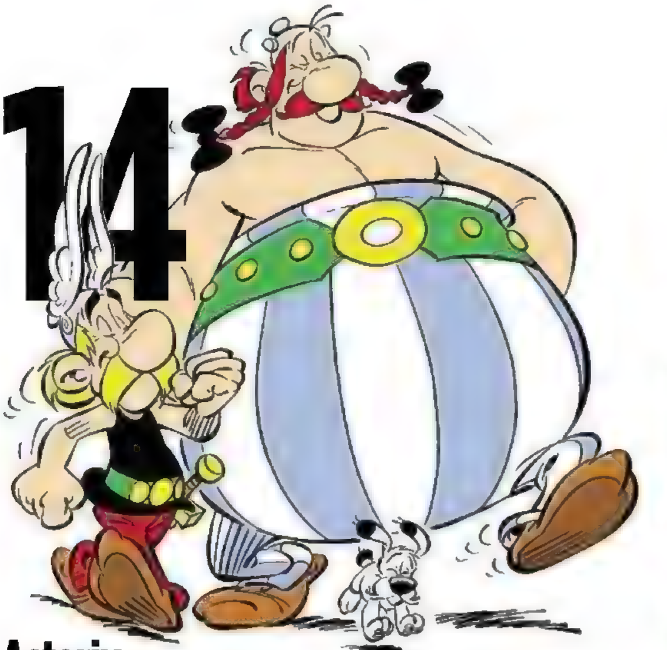


15

John Constantine

It was immediately clear that Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* supporting character – an enigmatic Sting lookalike, ultimately on the side of the angels but by no means a nice guy – has charisma to burn, but few would have figured his ongoing *Hellblazer* series would be Vertigo's most enduring hit. Aided by a succession of brilliant writers, Constantine's mysterious background has been explained and expanded without sacrificing the essentially unknowable core of the character.

14



Asterix

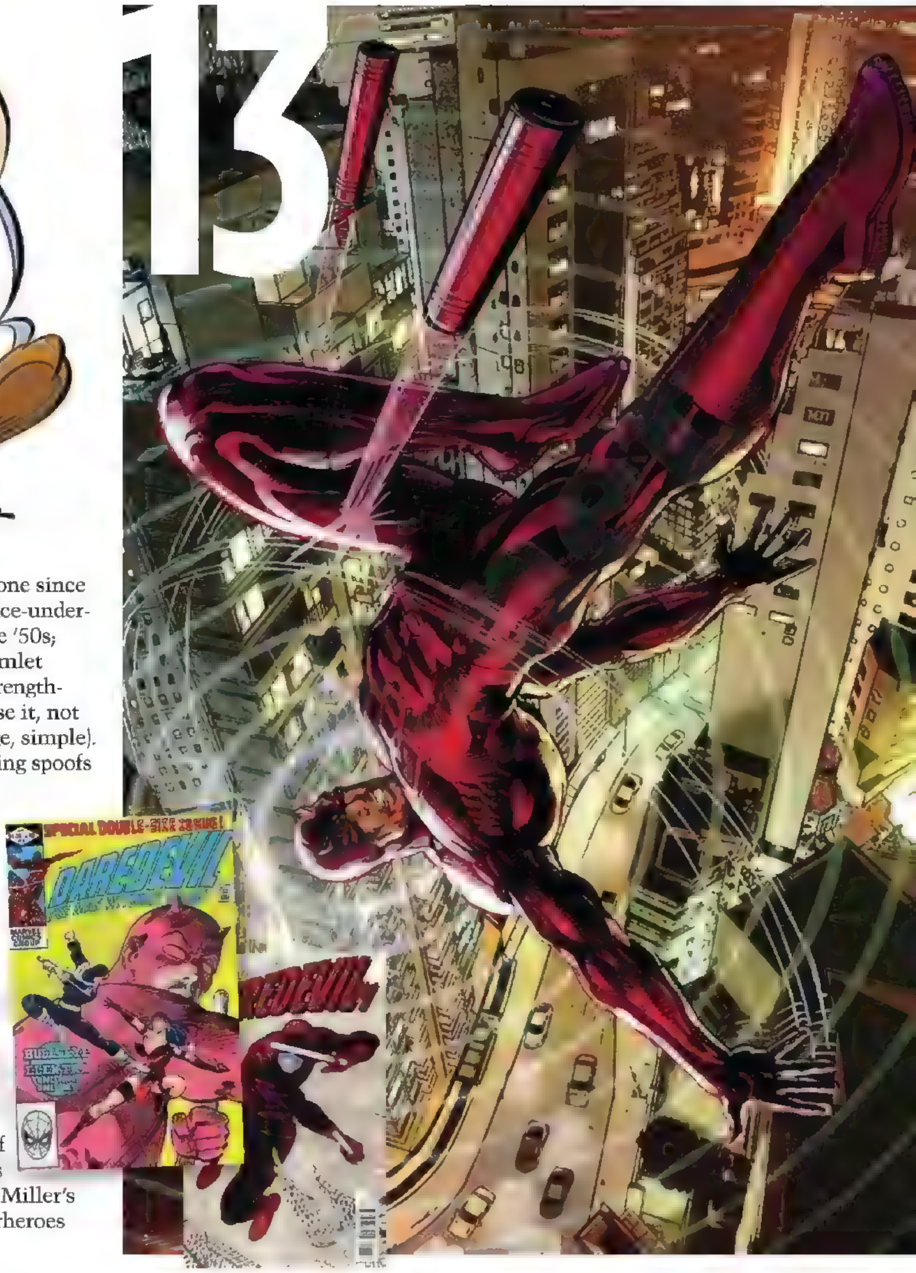
Writer René Goscinny and artist Albert Uderzo (Uderzo alone since his partner's death in 1977) have been producing their France-under-the-Roman-Empire comedy adventures since the end of the '50s; now 34-volumes strong, they tell of a tiny, plucky Gaul hamlet holding out alone against the might of Rome, thanks to a strength-giving magic potion and quest-loving villagers willing to use it, not least Asterix (short, cunning) and his best mate Obelix (huge, simple). Massive across Europe, *Asterix* mixes slapstick with winning spoofs on nationalities and modern life to cheeky, glorious effect.

13

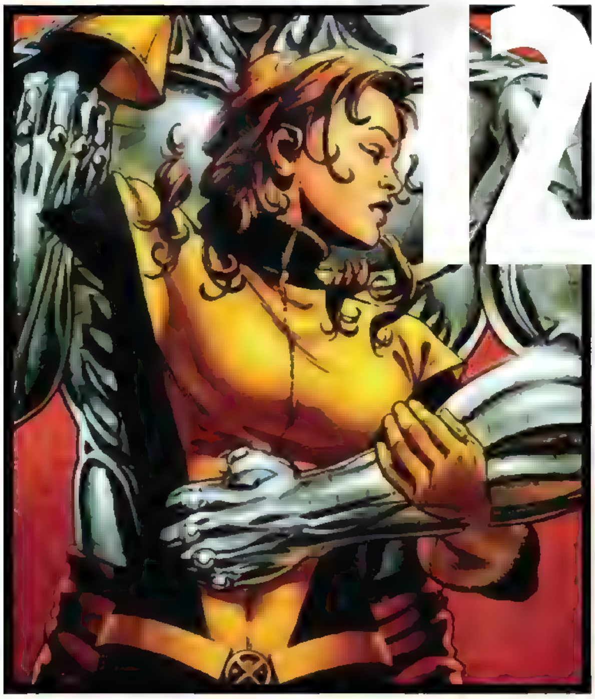
DAREDEVIL
MILLER
MAZZUCCHELLI
BORN AGAIN

Daredevil

Street-level and heavy on the soap opera, *Daredevil* was an often silly swashbuckling strip built around one of Stan Lee's classic heroes-with-disabilities concepts: Matt Murdock was a red-haired lawyer, blinded in an accident that also gave him super-senses and 'radar'. Good but no world-beater, he'd have likely dropped off the bottom of this list if not for Frank Miller's legendary run from the late '70s on: inventive and violent, Miller's stories mixed colourful gangsters, gritty street crime, superheroes and Eastern mysticism in a thrilling, romantic soup.


SPECIAL DOUBLE-SIZE ISSUE!
DAREDEVIL
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
DAREDEVIL

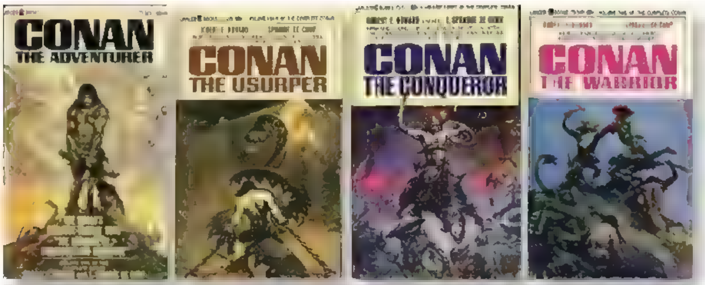
12



Kitty Pryde

The Claremont/Byrne X-Men run of the late '70s and early '80s is remarkable for many things, not least its potent heroines: African 'weather Goddess' Storm, doomed good girl Jean Grey, and – far from least – spunky 13-year-old mutant Kitty Pryde, a precocious Jewish chick based on a girl who lived in Byrne's apartment block. Brave and timorous, gawky and winsome, she was perhaps the first truly plausible teen in comics and she's given the X-Men heart and humanity ever since.

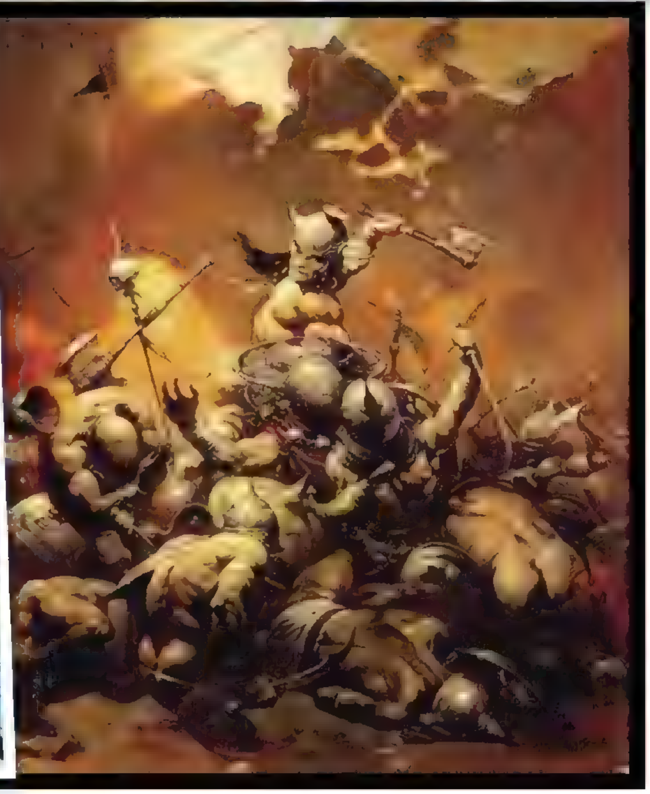
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
Merry Christmas
X-MEN
X-MEN
NATION
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
THE UNCANNY
X-MEN

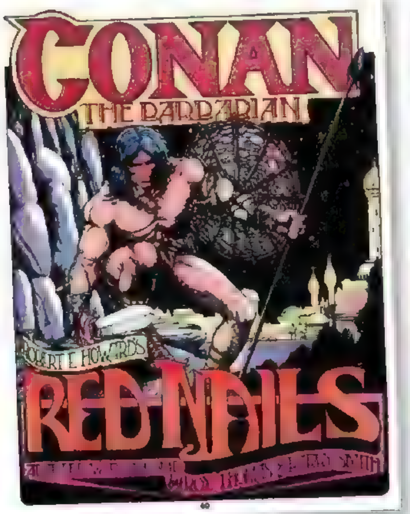

CONAN THE ADVENTURER
CONAN THE USURPER
CONAN THE CONQUEROR
CONAN THE WARRIOR

11

Conan

Tasked with rustling up projects of his own at the tail of the '60s, Marvel's new staff writer Roy Thomas chased down the rights to *Conan The Barbarian* – Robert E Howard's '30s pulp stories recently revived as paperback hits, and telling of a mercenary sword-and-sorcery hero fighting magic and monsters in a mythic ancient Europe. Brutal fantasies for chaotic times, Thomas' smart comic adaptations were served by magical Pre-Raphaelite art by hippie Englishman Barry Smith, then John Buscema's classical macho. Conan himself was a bold, romantic bruiser – America's most consistently high quality alternative to superheroes for over 20 years.




CONAN THE BARBARIAN
ROBERT E HOWARD'S
RED NAILS

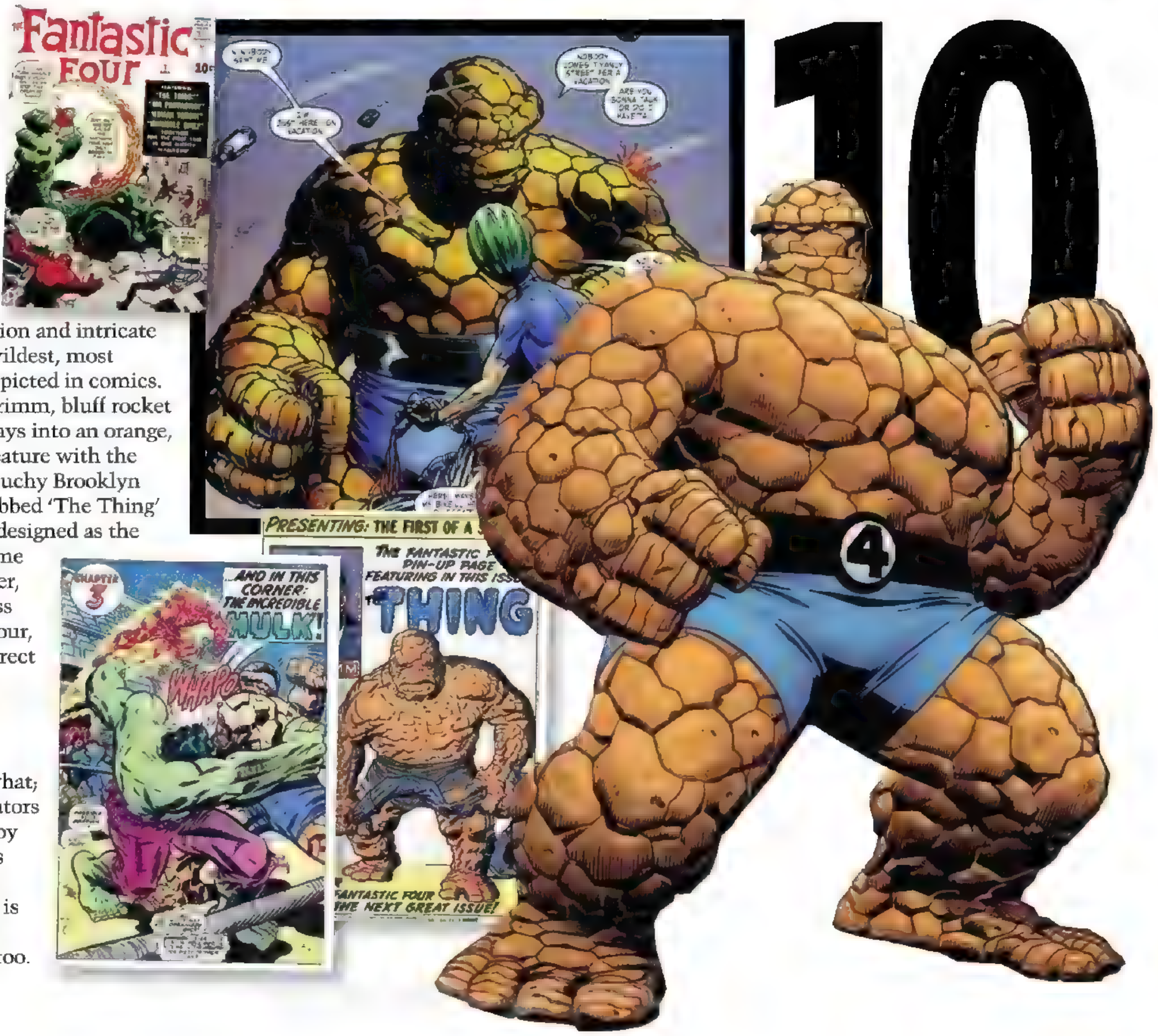
10

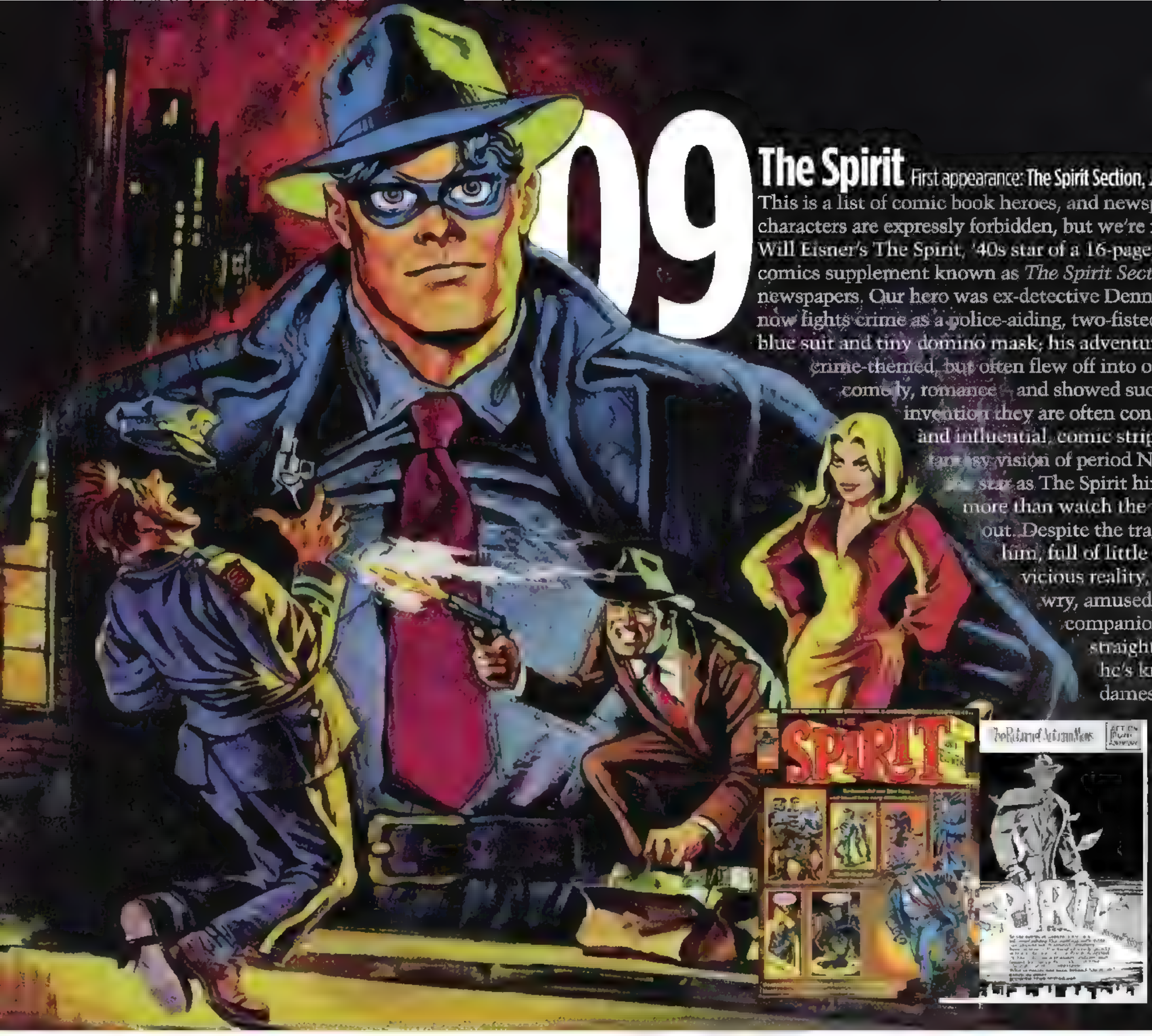
The Thing

First appearance:
The Fantastic Four #1, November 1961

Fantastic Four
1
10¢

Just a few years after DC revived the superhero book with The Flash and Green Lantern, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby at Marvel changed the industry with The Fantastic Four: a bickering family unit of semi-monstrous heroes, mixing powerful characterisation and intricate soap opera with some of the wildest, most imaginative adventure ever depicted in comics. The break-out star was Ben Grimm, bluff rocket pilot transformed by cosmic rays into an orange, rock-skinned, super-strong creature with the personality of a particularly touchy Brooklyn street fighter, insensitively dubbed 'The Thing' by his teammates. Originally designed as the team's 'heavy', Ben soon became its most lovable, tragic member, filled with a rage and bitterness masked by self-mocking humour, and tempered by an honest, direct approach to every problem. In Marvel's early years few were stronger, but his more recent status as a punch-bag has diminished The Thing somewhat; so has the failure of many creators to get past their intimidation by the Kirby years. Anyone who's read *The Fantastic Four*'s first decade knows that The Thing is the heart and soul of the team – and of the Marvel Universe too.


PRESENTING: THE FIRST OF A
THE FANTASTIC F
PIN-UP PAGE
FEATURING IN THIS ISS
THING
FANTASTIC FOUR
THE NEXT GREAT ISSUE!
CHAPTER 3
AND IN THIS CORNER: THE INCREDIBLE HULK!
WHAP
4



09

The Spirit

First appearance: **The Spirit Section, June 1940**

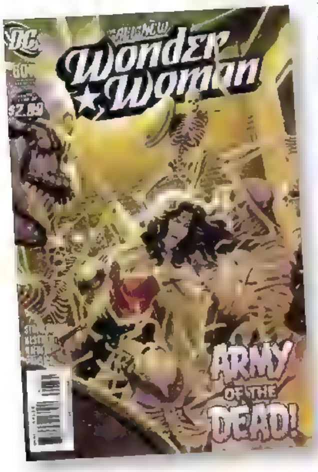
This is a list of comic book heroes, and newspaper adventure strip characters are expressly forbidden, but we're making an exception for Will Eisner's The Spirit, '40s star of a 16-page, tabloid-sized Sunday comics supplement known as *The Spirit Section*, distributed to 20 newspapers. Our hero was ex-detective Denny Colt, believed dead, who now fights crime as a police-aiding, two-fisted vigilante in a crumpled blue suit and tiny domino mask; his adventures were noir and crime-themed, but often flew off into other genres – horror, comedy, romance – and showed such visual and storytelling invention they are often considered the most creative and influential comic strips of all time. Eisner's fantasy vision of period New York, is often as much a star as The Spirit himself, who often does little more than watch the violence and pathos play out. Despite the tragic real-life drama around him, full of little guys being crushed by vicious reality, Denny himself remains a wry, amused, if somewhat distant companion – picking himself up and straightening his tie every time he's knocked silly by seductive dames or iron-fisted brutes.

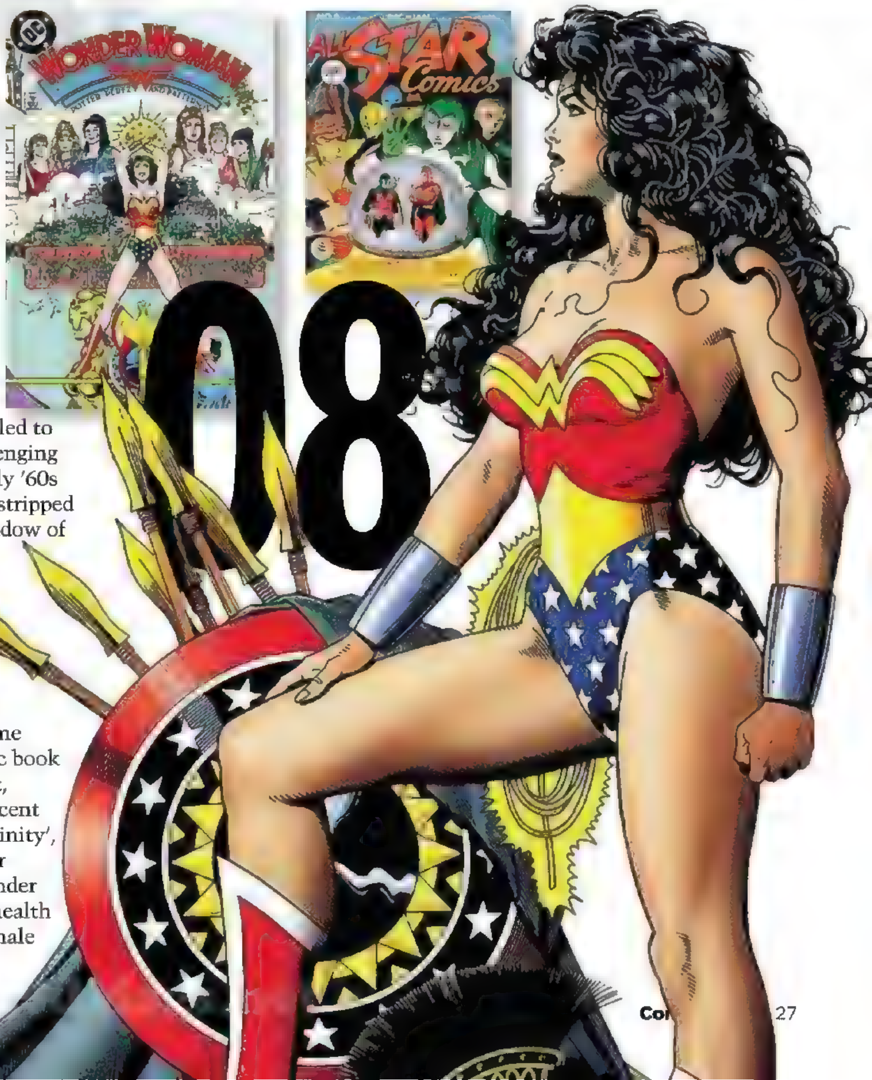
Many decades have seen the character in brief, but often high-quality, revivals – most recently Darwyn Cooke's glorious comic book version – but his real legacy lives on in the works of Alan Moore and Frank Miller who took tricks and inspiration from Will Eisner's wonderfully translucent hero and his world.

Wonder Woman

First appearance: **All Star Comics #8, December 1941**

She's our greatest, most widely recognised superheroine (only Catwoman, primarily a villain, comes anywhere close), and her history is a fascinating one: Diana – princess of a hidden island race of Amazons, now finding her way in a man's world – was created in the early '40s by psychologist William Marston, a man concerned with comics' 'blood-curdling masculinity' and fascinated by the female psyche. Her early adventures were full of innuendo to make even Robin blush – phallic torpedoes, lesbotic wrestling and endless bondage – but featured heady political and mythological themes too, with gender issues central. With this version castrated – for want of a better term – by Fredric Wertham's mid-'50s comic book purge, Wonder Woman stories have too often since struggled to decide what they are all about. Is she an envoy of peace? An avenging warrior? Should we take her seriously, or laugh at her? (Her early '60s adventures are loopy even for the time.) In the '60s, Diana was stripped of magic, Amazons, powers and costume, and turned into a shadow of Emma Peel – she even ran a clothes boutique! – but by the '70s feminist Gloria Steinem had spearheaded an intellectual appreciation of the character. It saved her. Soon Wonder Woman had her costume back, and a hit TV show, and in time came some good runs on the comic book too – notably George Perez's sweet, myth-heavy '80s turn. With her recent status as the third of DC's core 'Trinity', and a well-received relaunch under superstar writer Brian Azzarello under way, Diana appears to be in rude health – no less than our most potent female pop culture icon deserves.





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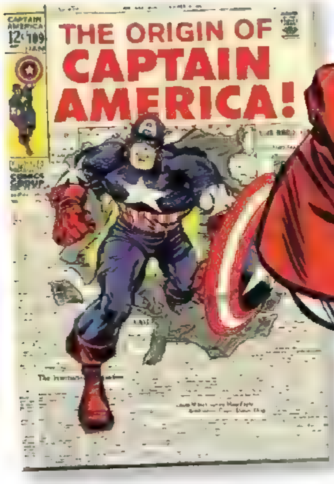


Captain America

First appearance: **Captain America Comics #1, March 1941**

Created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby as a patriotic champion, then brought to modern-day prominence when revived from ice-bound suspended animation in an early issue of *The Avengers*, Captain America has long tempered his potentially unpleasant flag-waving, drug-cheating qualities with man-sized helpings of alienation and self-doubt. Theoretically non-powered – the super-soldier treatments that turned runtish GI-wannabe Steve Rogers into a huge, blonde hunk didn't actually give him superstrength, just turned him into 'the perfect man' – the reborn '60s Cap retained the fighting prowess to hold his own amongst Norse gods and man-robots, but was still a 'stranger in a strange land', baffled by the politics and social mores, and mourning the death of his sidekick Bucky Barnes. Initially depicted as a weary veteran, morbidly grieving, Cap has since grown into one of Marvel's central figures, his Rip Van Winkle qualities enlivened by supreme combat skills and an unswerving moral code – these days, you can tell which side is meant to be 'right' in any of Marvel's many inter-hero squabbles by watching who Cap teams with. Rogers consistently takes part in many of Marvel's most thrilling fight scenes too, his unbreakable shield somehow inspiring artists to gift him combat more dynamic than that of almost any other champion. Under Cap's knock-out stars-and-stripes costume beats a true hero's heart, and a pleasing mix of qualities and symbol.

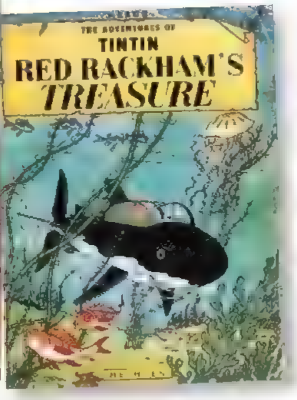
HERGÉ
THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN
EXPLORERS ON THE MOON

06

Tintin

First appearance: **Le Petit Vingtième, January 1929**

As consistently popular as Superman, and almost as influential, *The Adventures of Tintin* is simply a phenomenon – never out of print, loved by each new generation, populariser of the beautifully simple ligne claire art style. Georges Remi (writing as 'Hergé') originally created his fearless young reporter-cum-explorer for an adventure strip in the children's section of a Belgian Christian newspaper, but Tintin soon grew beyond the rather slapdash chases and gags of the first stories, graduating into a series of sophisticated, well-researched and cleverly structured globetrotting adventures packed with memorable characters and sharp sub-plots. (Compare a '30s adventure such as 'Cigars Of The Pharaoh' to anything being published in America at the time – there really is no contest.) Tintin himself is a bit of a boy scout figure, an everyman of vague age and no obvious employer, but his supporting cast provide more than enough colour – salty, hard-drinking Captain Haddock; bumbling, near-identical detective duo Thomson and Thompson – for any half-dozen strips, while Tintin's loyal companion Snowy, a snarky white fox terrier, is perhaps the greatest sidekick in all comics. Though indisputably plucky, loyal and lucky, Tintin himself can be boringly wholesome at times; a trait that's pushed him down this list a place or two. His best adventures, however – beautifully constructed, effortlessly funny, and with real resonance – are amongst the very greatest the medium has produced.



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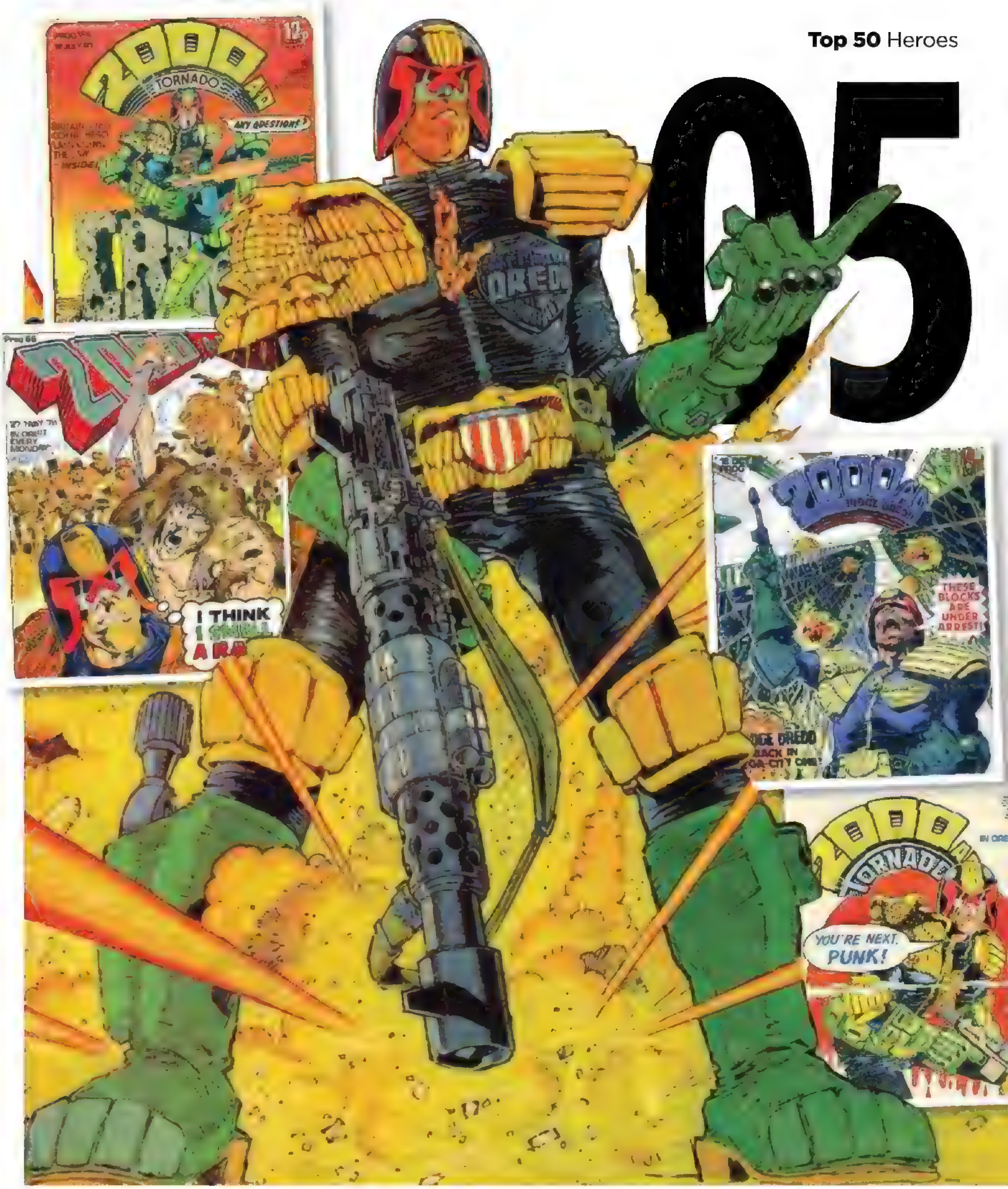

2000 AD
TORNADO
ANY QUESTION?
DREDD
I THINK I SHALL A...
THESE BLOCKS ARE UNDER ARREST!
JUDGE DREDD BACK IN MEGA-CITY ONE
YOU'RE NEXT, PUNK!

Judge Dredd First appearance: 2000 AD #2, March 1977

The most successful British comic-book character of the modern era, and *2000 AD*'s lead strip since he first appeared in the late '70s, Dredd is a tough, uniformed street cop patrolling Mega-City One, a vast metropolis gobbling up most of America's East Coast over 100 years hence. Joe Dredd's world is alternately violent and blackly comic, largely a mutant-filled post-apocalyptic wasteland in which huddle a dozen or so monstrous, overcrowded city-states. With the citizens mad and often dangerous, and wave after wave of external threats queued up to settle MC-1's hash, Dredd and his fellow judges have, through necessity, become fascist dictators as much as lawmen – increasingly, the pragmatic, emotionless, supremely efficient Dredd has struggled with this in recent decades, adding philosophical depth to the dark humour, high adventure and cynical ultra-violence. Many excellent British artists have made their name on Dredd, but much of his appeal is down to the consistency and long-term planning afforded by using a small roster of writers, of which the undisputed daddy is co-creator John Wagner: it is thanks to him that Dredd ages realistically and grows as a person, while never losing the merciless, hewn-from-granite qualities that first made this dark hero such a hit.

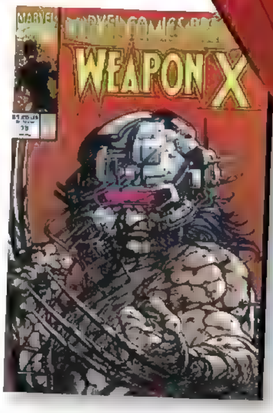
04

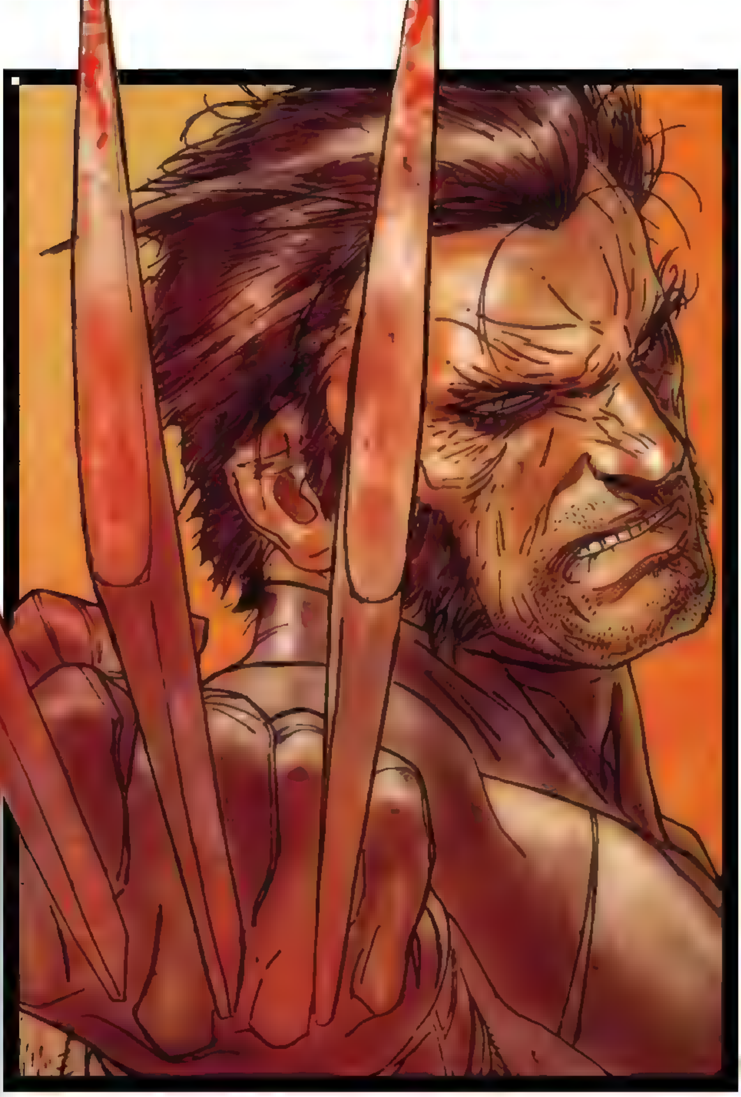
Wolverine

First appearance: **Incredible Hulk #180, October 1974**

Fans who'd grown up with the rush of invention of the '60s were drifting away from comics by the mid-'70s; it's partly Wolverine who dragged them back. That decade's great Chris Claremont/John Byrne run on *X-Men* was dominated by women – Jean and Storm, Kitty and Emma – and brought a new female audience. Wolverine – the team's feisty, runtish, Canadian scrapper – bored Claremont, but was fellow-Canuck Byrne's fave, and under his guidance soon developed into a useful Y-chromosome counterpoint: a carnivore killer struggling to be human, he brooded, took on the X-Men's dirty jobs, injected a rude, smug sense of humour, and demonstrated an arrogant, blue-collar cool that quickly made him the most dynamic hero in comics, a bad boy that every morally ambiguous 'killer' hero since has tried (and failed) to match.

Originally created as one of those military agents who were always chasing the Hulk in the '70s, Wolverine had a handful of key, core attributes from the off: he's shorter than any other male hero, but tougher and braver too, willing to take on any opponent, no matter how out-classed; his claws and weirdo hair give him an immediately recognisable silhouette; and his indestructible metal bones and 'healing factor' allow him to take endless punishment before the inevitable Marvel hero fight-back. The ever-mysterious Logan (Wolverine's true background and identity was spun-out like few secrets in comics) has since become perhaps Marvel's most valuable player.





03

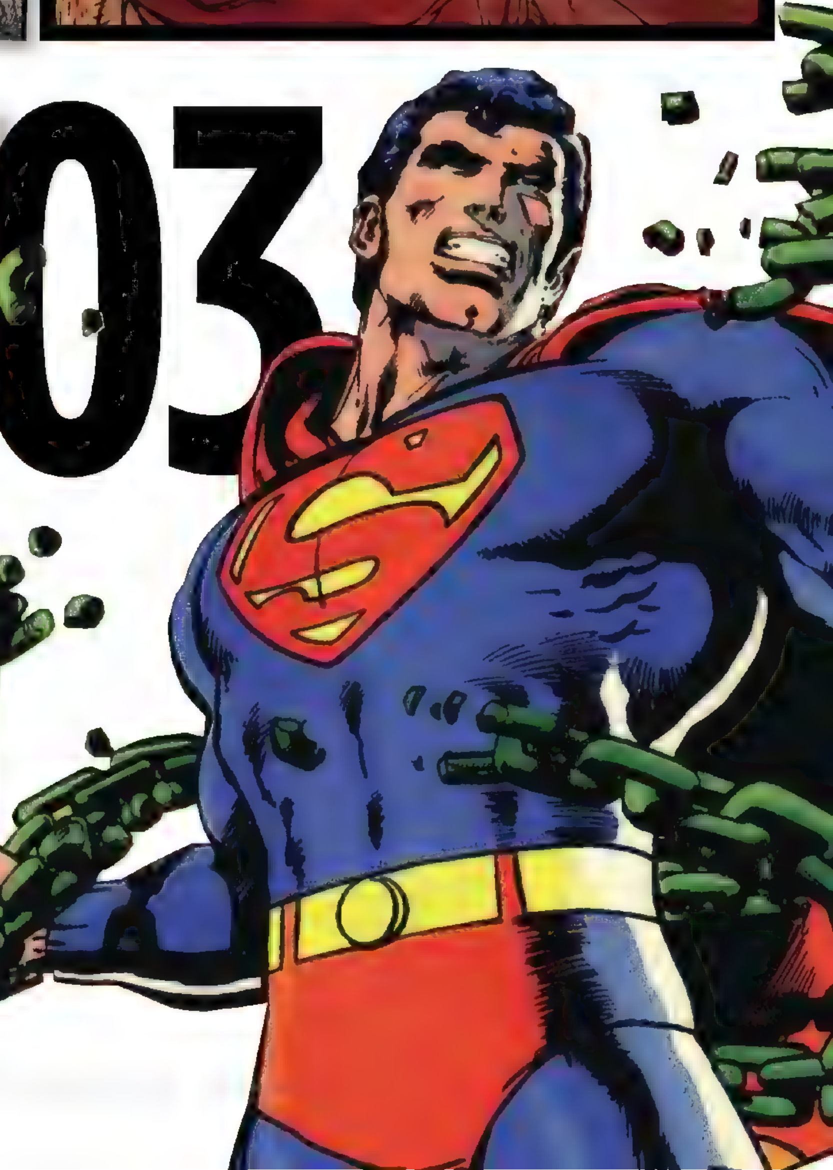
Superman

First appearance: **Action Comics #1, June 1938**

ACTION COMICS

He's the first superhero, and the most powerful; the most noble, many would argue, and almost certainly the most famous. He should top this list, and by some unassailable distance. That he doesn't is down to one tragic flaw: the comics themselves. Here's the problem: a few noble exceptions aside, Superman strips since the classic '50s-'60s heyday have been a parade of the ordinary, the gimmicky, the risible and the simply crap, generation after generation of creator rendered impotent by Clark Kent's combination of symbol, history, extreme power and unfashionable purity of heart. Done right, of course, Superman can be wonderful – witness the Donner films, or the wonderful *All-Star Superman* – so it has to be seen as a collective failing of the American comics industry that the number of truly brilliant recent depictions of the character can be counted on one hand.

But wait: if any hero can afford to dwell on past glories it's surely this one, and Superman's past is truly magnificent. Initially depicted as an angry blue-collar chap, with few personal quirks or failings, Superman grew and developed through the comic industry's collective '50s coma – a period where he kept the superhero concept alive, virtually single-handedly – until he spearheaded the Silver Age revival. This Superman became the definitive one, no longer simply a symbol of power and justice but a real person with hobbies, friends and a past. This goofy, horribly moving version of Supes – with his flying dog and bottle cities – offered a charming, highly-detailed fairytale world unlike anything else in comics. It was wonderful, but it's been downhill in fits and starts ever since; somehow the ultimate immigrant has been recast as a plodding symbol of white-bread establishment – one reason the recent return to the sweating, radical Superman of Siegel and Shuster's earliest strips is so exciting.



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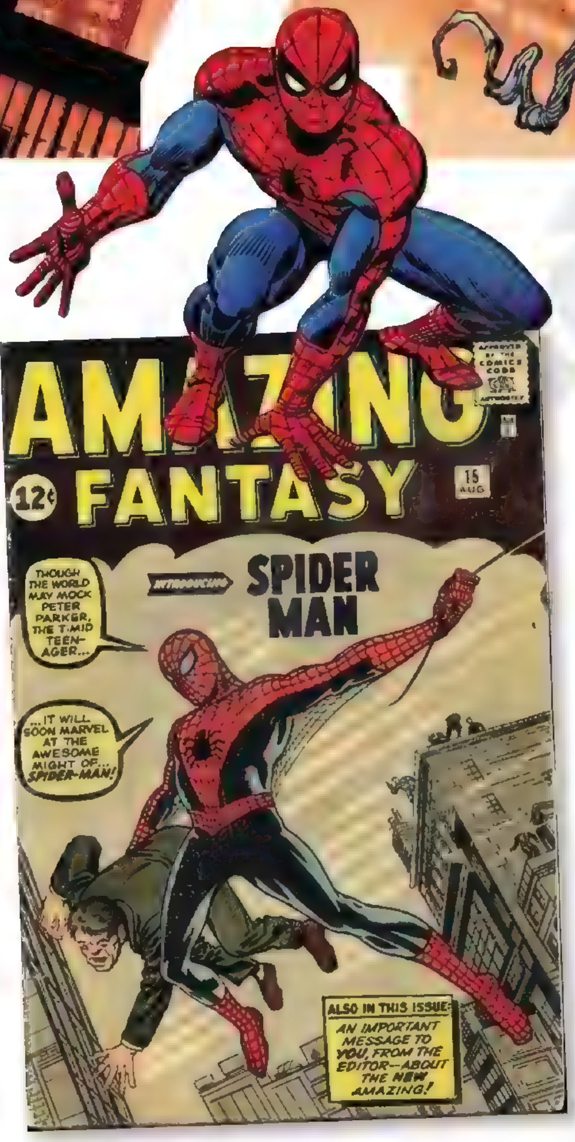

AMAZING
FANTASY
12¢
15 AUG
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
THOUGH THE WORLD MAY MOCK PETER PARKER, THE TIMID TEEN-AGER...
INTRODUCING
SPIDER MAN
...IT WILL SOON MARVEL AT THE AWESOME MIGHT OF... SPIDER-MAN!
ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO YOU, FROM THE EDITOR—ABOUT THE NEW AMAZING!

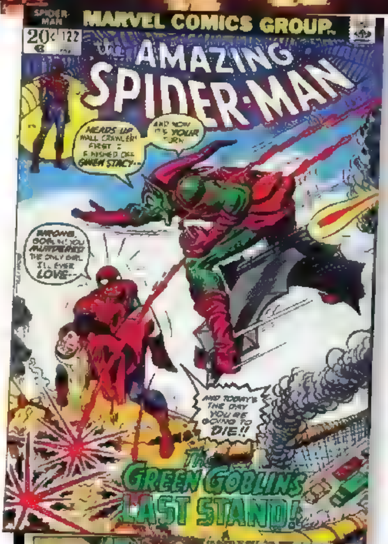
Spider-Man

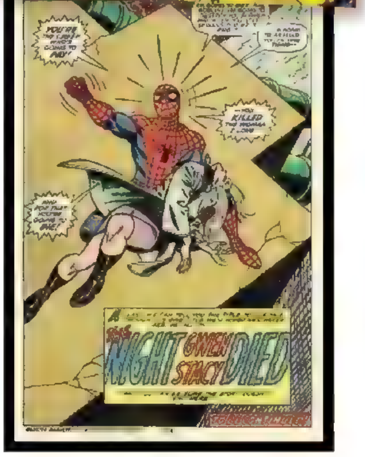
First appearance: Amazing Fantasy #15, August 1962

The Fantastic Four of '61 had been an inspiration, but in its wake came an even finer Marvel comic: the real-world (as real as comics get, at least) adventures of an ordinary bad-luck teen gifted with extensive, but not world-beating, superpowers and thence struggling to do the right thing in the face of other pressing engagements: with a sick relative, mean peers, fickle girls, elusive cash, callous bosses and all the other confusions of modern, big city life.

Spider-Man made all other comic book heroes look hopelessly old fashioned and fanciful; Peter Parker's life echoed our own, offering a smart, bookish teenager's view of an unfair universe that lent grit to every adventure. Spider-Man is always an interesting hero to watch, and usually to listen to – desperate mid-battle quips (writer Stan Lee's jolly surface chatter barely hiding artist Steve Ditko's broad hints at madness) have long been part of his armoury – but to play Spidey as a straightforward superhero is to abandon much of what makes him great; without the deeply-ingrained world-against-me vibe, Spider-Man threatens to become a weak, half-hearted thing. Unlike many heroes, he only really works when placed in the most down-to-earth surroundings; not gritty alleyways, necessarily, but a recognisable world where he can be constantly irritated by waves of minor, mundane problems.

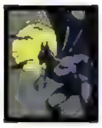
Core to Spider-Man's character is the fact that he's a bad luck case. An older, married Spider-Man is a problem because, at its core, this is a strip about growing up a confusing time, certainly, but what has always stopped Spidey being a depression-fest is the sheer wit of the thing, the joy of youth culture skipping hand-in-hand with heartache.

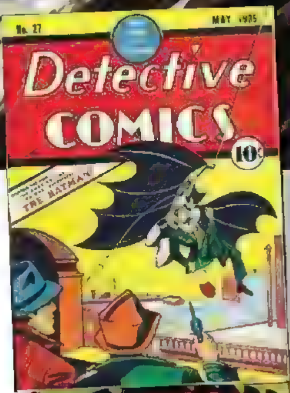

SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
20¢ 122
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
HEADS UP, WALL-CRAWLER! FIRST I FINISHED OFF GWEN STACY--
AND NOW IT'S YOUR TURN!
WRONG, GOBLIN! YOU MURDERED THE ONLY GIRL I'LL EVER LOVE--
AND TODAY'S THE DAY YOU ARE GOING TO DIE!!
THE GREEN GOBLIN'S LAST STAND!


THE NIGHT GWEN STACY DIED

Batman

First appearance: **Detective Comics #27, May 1939**

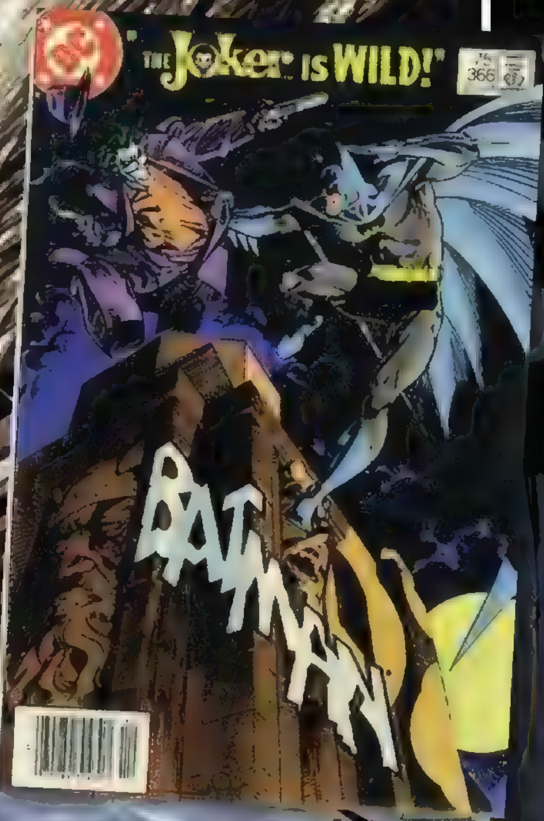


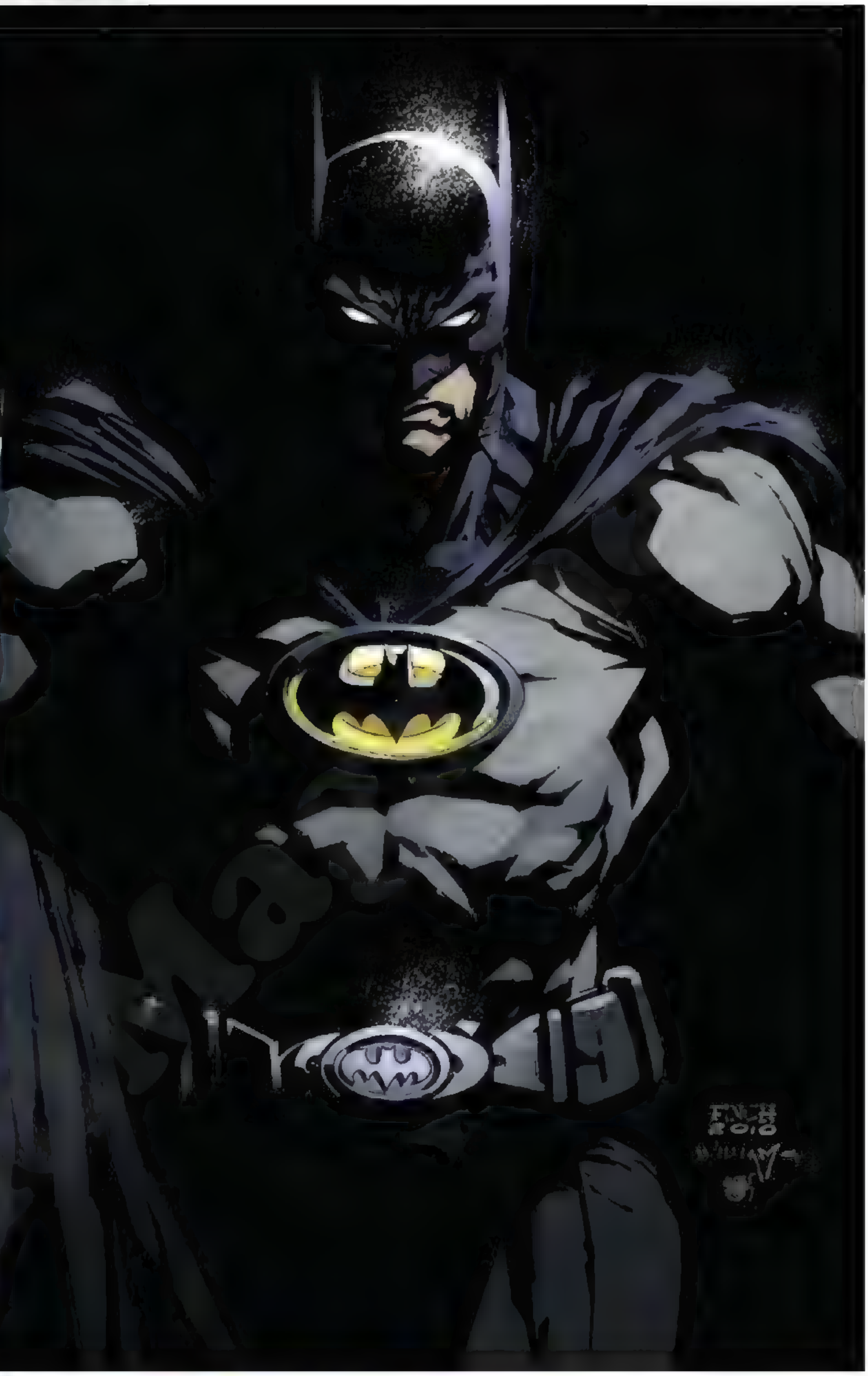


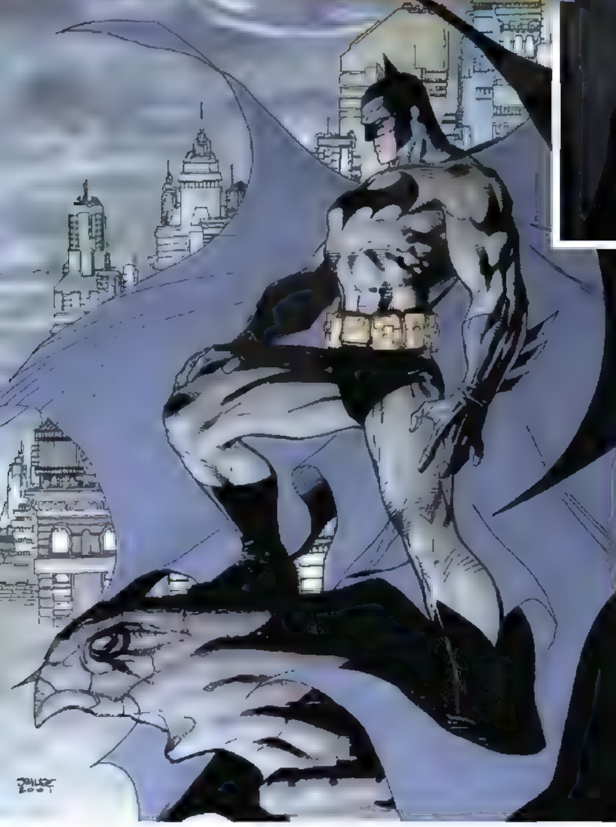
BATMAN
– WHO HE IS AND HOW HE CAME TO BE!

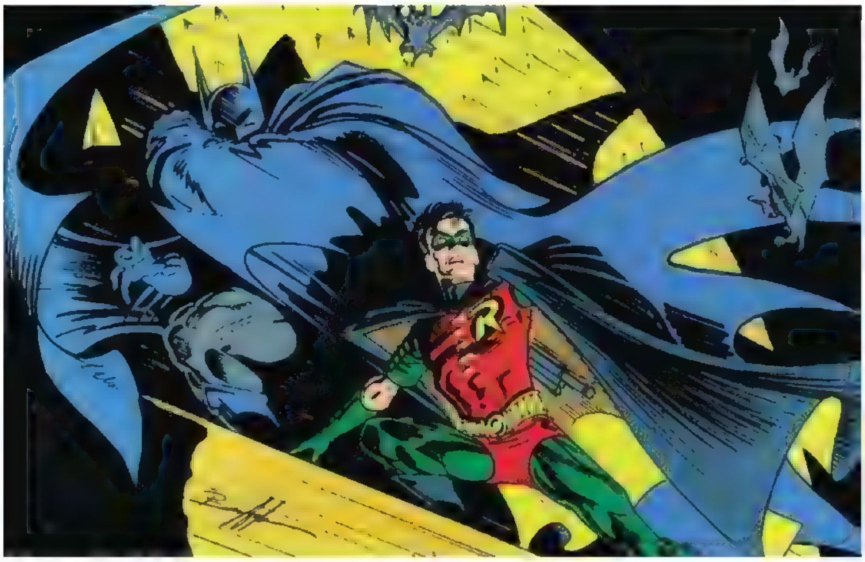
Batman is "as good and pure a superhero as you can find," Frank Miller once said, and we all know that's true and hopelessly inaccurate, both at once. After all, you could say there's *nothing* pure about millionaire Bruce Wayne's crime-fighting alter ego, and that Gotham City's protector is at best hopelessly compromised – and at worst an insane menace, in his way as dangerous to his hometown as the parade of lunatic gangsters who continually menace it. Batman is not a hero we could fantasise about being for long – he's too tragic, too broken – but he's as fascinating a figure as comics have to offer nonetheless. Lacking powers but dedicated beyond belief, the Dark Knight is the weakest superhero – but also the one the rest are most afraid of, the sort of human hero who, in Greek myth, would threaten gods.

Batman works because we can understand his motives (grief, revenge) and because he has the best costume, the prettiest 'toys', the oddest enemies – and the most compelling backdrop in Gotham, epitome of thrusting America teetering out of control. He is also versatile: where Spider-Man flounders outside realistic New York, and Superman is hopelessly vulnerable to the skill of his creators, Batman tends to work wherever you put him. Everything that happens in Gotham is both elaborate game and deadly parable, and its stories can be told with a wink or a frown or a sneer; at their centre, our hero is an unknowable yet very human force holding apart two worlds, the troubled modern metropolis and an underworld of madmen and monsters. He's the best hero we have – certainly the most valuable. Would Marvel swap Spider-Man for him? You bet. But DC would offer Superman instead. **CH**


DC
"THE JOKER IS WILD!"
366
BATMAN







THIS IS A JOB FOR... MORGAN SPURLOCK!

The man behind *Super Size Me* tells **Chris Anderson** why making his new Comic-Con documentary has been a labour of love...

Images © Comic Con © Stills from Comic Con Episode IV: A Fan's Hope

It's hard to take a man who has appeared on a movie poster with a mouth stuffed full of French fries seriously, but Morgan Spurlock of *Super Size Me* fame has never been one for subtlety. He didn't pull any punches in his later documentaries either, such as *Where In The World Is Osama Bin Laden?* and *The Greatest Movie Ever Sold*, which makes us wonder if the subject of his newest film is a little light in comparison – the San Diego Comic-Con.

On meeting Spurlock, however, the real reason for choosing the topic becomes clear. This isn't an experiment or exposé, this is a labour of love. "I loved comics when I was growing up," he reveals. "And I loved horror films, they were one of my biggest passions – when David Cronenberg made that guy's head explode in *Scanners*, it changed my life forever. The first Comic-Con I went to was when we were casting for *Simpsons Super Fans*. When I got there I just thought, 'This place is a movie – we have to make a movie about this'."

Fast forward a few years and the result is about to be released, the amusingly titled *Comic-Con Episode IV: A Fan's Hope*. What stood out for Spurlock on his visit to the San Diego event was the people he met – who pinned their hopes, dreams and obsessions on Comic-Con – and that's what he wanted to convey. The film differs from Spurlock's previous efforts in that he's merely an observer, and it's the fans that take centre stage. "People are so passionate about comics and everyone is there for their own reason," he says. "We were looking for people wearing certain costumes, people who were there to see certain panels and who had flown halfway round the world to buy a toy. There were certain touchstones, and we had a casting director trying to find all these people. It was a tremendous amount of work."

Luckily, it was that first visit to San Diego – and a chance meeting with Stan Lee, who eventually signed on as a producer – that got the ball rolling. "I was at a party one night and met Stan Lee," Spurlock recalls. "So I went to kiss the ring – because when you meet Stan

Cuddly Joss Whedon produces.

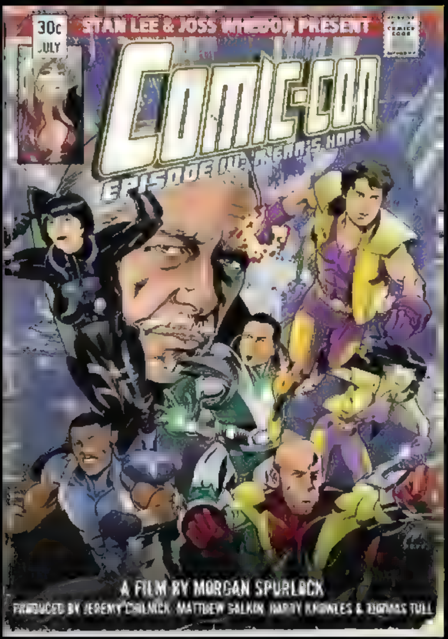
> “I told Stan Lee ‘It was your comics that gave me the courage to tell my own stories’.”

Lee you have to, he's the Pope of comics – and I said to him, 'You changed my life growing up. It was your comics that gave me the courage to tell my own stories'. And he said [adopts a Stan Lee voice], 'Oh Morgan, that's so nice, you know we should make a movie together… we should make a documentary about Comic-Con'. It was this completely ridiculous Hollywood moment."

The idea gathered momentum just seconds later when Spurlock told his agent. "He asked how it was meeting Stan and I said, 'It was amazing, we're going to make a movie about Comic-Con'. So he said I should meet his other client who was coming to town. Cut to the next day and I'm having breakfast with Joss Whedon, creator of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and director of *The Avengers*. I told him about the film and asked him to produce. He said, 'Absolutely'. So then I went to the board of directors of Comic-Con and said, 'We want to make this film, it's Joss, it's Stan, it's me', and they said, 'For decades people have wanted to make this film, we've always said no, but this time it just might work.'"

You can still sense the excitement in Spurlock's voice as he explains how the film came together. It's clearly a sentiment that won over the Comic-Con organisers.

"To tell the story that we wanted, the story of Comic-Con, there's no secret to it," Spurlock argues. "It's not like you're pulling back the curtain and saying, 'Look how evil it is! It's ruined comics forever!' What Comic-Con has done is take something we all know and love and expanded it, to a point where so many other people can enjoy it. If it wasn't for that Comic-Con [San Diego], there wouldn't be Comic-Cons all over the country. It set off a chain reaction. But you need their blessing for a film of this magnitude – to get backstage and have the access that we did."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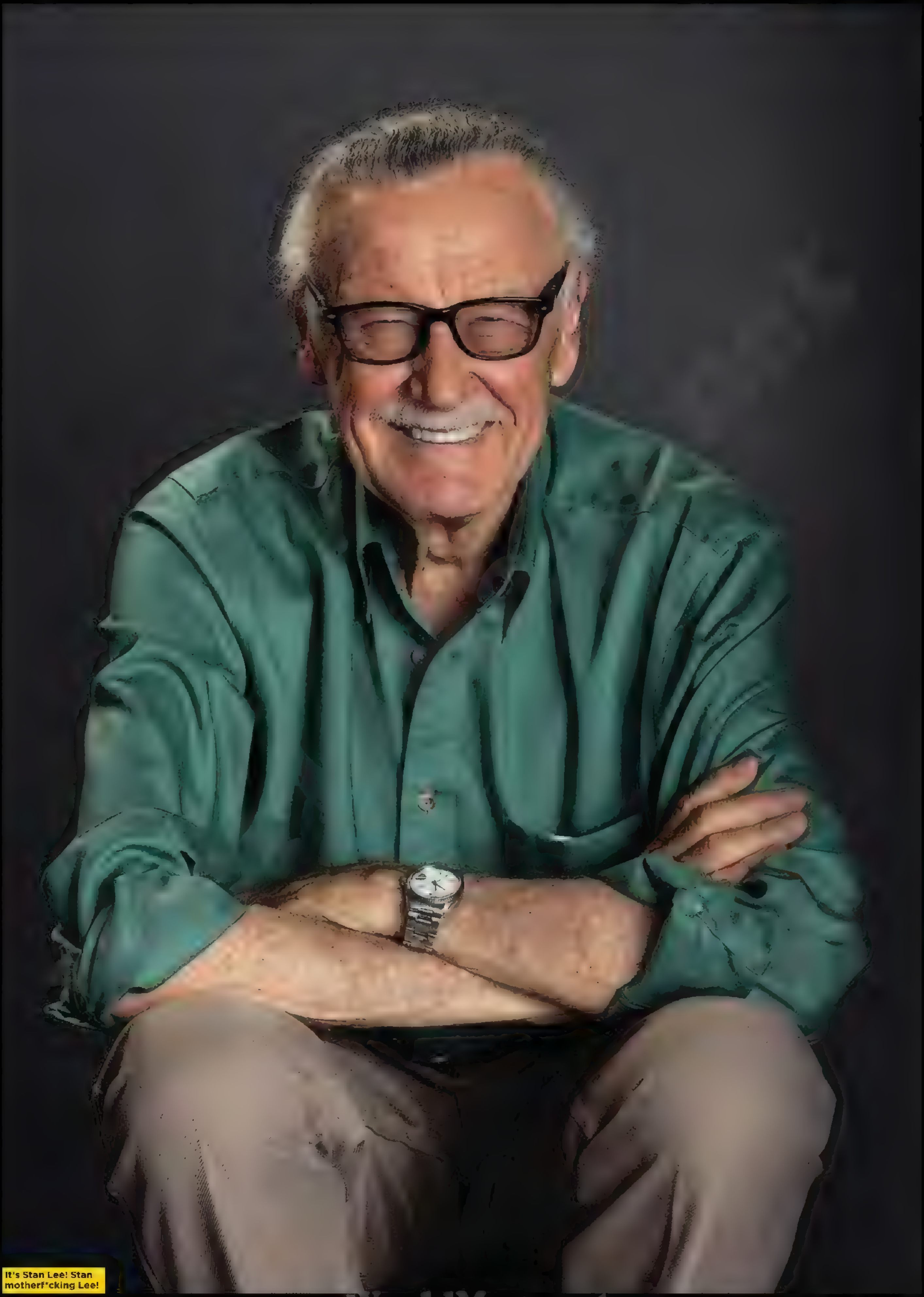
JULY
STAN LEE & JOSS WHEDON PRESENT
Comic-Con
EPISODE IV: A FAN'S HOPE
A FILM BY MORGAN SPURLOCK
PRODUCED BY JEREMY CHILNICK, MATTHEW GALKIN, HARRY KNOWLES & THOMAS TULL

INSIDE STORY

Spurlock infiltrated the 2010 San Diego Comic-Con with his 175-person crew, the biggest he's ever used on one project. The film starts with grainy black and white footage of the very first Comic-Con in 1970 – consisting of one room, a few bearded men and rows of boxes of comics – and then jumps to the present and the sprawling costume-filled extravaganza it has become. Many of the fans and famous faces – Kevin Smith, Eli Roth, Frank Miller and Seth Green among them – who attended that year, speak to camera, telling Spurlock's team what it means to them. "The minute we announced we wanted to talk to people at the show, we immediately filled up all four days," Spurlock reveals.

But this is merely a foil to the stories of the individuals heading to Comic-Con. We meet



It's Stan Lee! Stan motherf*cking Lee!

st Ave.
↑ Ground Transpor
Parking Elevators ↑

"No photographs, please. I SAID NO-"

FOREWORDS BY STAN LEE • JOSS WHEDON • HARRY KNOWLES • THOMAS TULL

COMIC-CON

EPISODE IV: A FAN'S HOPE

AN ALL-ACCESS LOOK AT THE WORLD'S LARGEST POP-CULTURE EVENT
BY MORGAN SPURLOCK FEATURING PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALBA TULL

Kevin Smith makes an appearance...

them at home before the event and learn of their intentions – there's the ageing comic seller pining for the old days and hoping to sell his prized copy of *Red Raven #1* to revive his business; two aspiring comic book artists looking to land a job; the gamer wanting to take first prize in the costume parade; and Jamie, the Kevin Smith fan trying desperately to plan a proposal to his girlfriend.

Spurlock put out a call for audition videos to find the people he needed. "Some were excellent," says Spurlock. "Holly Conrad – who made the costumes – her video was great, because it was just Holly in her garage showing what she was doing. Skip Harvey, one of the artists, actually green-screened himself onto the deck of the Starship Enterprise!"

Clearly these are people who are passionate about Comic-Con, and also determined – we see Holly and her friends win the costume parade with their *Mass Effect* designs, one of the artists is hired, and a wedding is soon on the cards with a little help from Kevin Smith. With friends in high places, is the latter something Spurlock helped out with? "Not at all," he reveals. "We made sure people were doing this on their own. And especially with Jamie, we could have talked to Kevin and set it up, but he did it all, called up his office and got in touch with his assistant. It was great."

Perhaps inspired by Seth Green, who reveals in the documentary that he met his own wife at Comic-Con, Spurlock was looking for people for whom the event had been a life changer. "One of the things we wanted was Comic-Con couples, people who had fallen in love because of Comic-Con," he says. "Jamie and his girlfriend had met in a cafe in Santa Barbara, both perusing the San Diego Comic-Con schedule, he sees her and says, 'Hey, I'm going too', and they start talking and end up going together and falling in love. One year on, there they are in their matching T-shirts. And when they sent in their video, they told that story. Then she left the room and he said [whispering], 'The real reason I want to go this year is because I want to propose at Comic-Con'. The minute I saw that I was, like, these guys are in this."

The film does have a certain positive feel about it, even for the comic seller, who by the end doesn't have to part with his US$500,000 copy of *Red Raven* and manages to make a profit with his graphic novels. But his inclusion in the film is clearly to show how

...As does a sinister Frank Miller.

> **“We wanted Comic-Con couples. People who had fallen in love because of Comic-Con”**

the event is no longer just about comics. Is that side of it shrinking? “The only thing shrinking is the actual physical comic,” Spurlock argues. “I still buy comics, but I haven’t bought a physical comic since I got my iPad. I download everything through Comixology and read them in bed at night. The commodity of a comic book is shrinking, but I don’t think comic creativity is going away.”

When pressed to reveal which comics he’s reading, Spurlock is happy to elaborate. “I love *Irredeemable*, the Mark Waid series, which is amazing – what would happen if the most powerful superhero on the planet suddenly went rogue. And then there is a companion series, *Incorruptible*, about his nemesis, who says, ‘Well, if he’s going to do that, I’m the only person who can become the good guy here’. A great switcheroo. I love *DMZ* as well, and also *Y: The Last Man*.”

Having such an established interest in the subject matter, you have to wonder who Spurlock might disguise himself as if he went to Comic-Con in costume, as so many do in the film. “As a kid I loved Plastic Man, but his costume is terrible,” he tells us, laughing. “It’s like this red leotard with a belt on it that stretches with his skin. We went to this past Comic-Con to tease the movie, and we also made this companion book that went with the film, a beautiful coffee table book, and I was taking my son – he’s turned five, he was four last summer – and I was showing it to him. I said, ‘These are the people you’re going to see, this is where we’re going.’ And he was so excited, he said, ‘Daddy, I could be Batman!’ And I said yes, yes you can. Then he stopped and said, ‘No! You could be Batman, and I could be Batboy’. I said, absolutely. So at this year’s Comic-Con, I went as Batman and he was Batboy, and it was awesome. And yes, I was the only Batman with a porn star moustache.” **CH**

Comic Con Episode IV: A Fan’s Hope will be released in the UK in Spring 2012, while the book is available now from Forbidden Planet.

Costume queen

Holly Conrad is featured in the film winning the costume parade competition with her friends as characters from *Mass Effect*. She has since been hired as a consultant on the upcoming *Mass Effect* movie.

When will the job on *Mass Effect* start?
I’m not sure. They’re looking for a director right now, and when that happens they’ll probably contact me. But I’m super excited – I hope it’s all going to happen very quickly.

Why do you love Comic-Con? What excites you about it?
Comic-Con for me, it’s a community and I’ve been going for six years. All my friends go, and I’ve made friends there. That’s my culture, that’s how you get through the hard parts in life, knowing that Comic-Con is coming up in July. It’s not about New Year, it’s about Comic-Con.

The film was made in 2010. What was your costume for 2011?
We made costumes for Bioware. The games company commissioned us to make three new creature suits and one new animatronic suit for their marketing team to wear. But they realised it’s really hard to wear costumes... They never made it to the floor. They stayed in their base at the Hilton and we ended up wearing the costumes for them. They thought they could do it, but it’s the awkwardness, having so much on you. One costume had stilts!

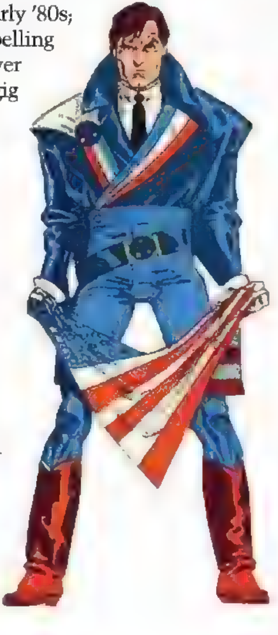
HIDDEN
GEMS

NATIONAL TREASURE

"Someone's gotta put it all back together," claimed *American Flagg!*, Chaykin's loud, sexy satire on '80s sin. **By Matt Bielby**

In 1986 came *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*, and American comics would never be the same – or (let's be honest) quite as good again. Before these, however, came the John the Baptist books, bridges from the old to the new: Alan Moore on *Swamp Thing*, Frank Miller's *Ronin*, and – perhaps most remarkable of all – Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg!* It was sleazy and inventive, full of sex, violence, politics and betrayal, an HBO series on paper fully 15 years before the debut of *The Sopranos*, premium cable TV's first hour-long drama hit.

Chaykin had been knocking about comics for a decade by the early '80s; always a fine artist and compelling storyteller, but somehow never quite landing a star-making gig – sure, his ideas were always dynamic (and often sexily deviant), but he disliked superheroes and seemed to lack focus, rarely sticking at the same thing for long. (Indeed, he'd briefly abandoned his comics work – roguish sci-fi heroes a speciality – in favour of two boring, troubled years doing paperback covers.) But then the fledgling First Comics of Chicago (a mixed bag of local comics dealers and investors, inspired by the instant success of start-ups like Pacific) tempted him back, with the promise of a more professionally managed 'independent' publisher, plus royalties, co-ownership and all the rest.



Sick of 'whiny, loser' heroes, Chaykin promised a provocative adventure and entertainment strip, full of jokes, and with the year-long story flow of a great newspaper adventure serial such as 'Terry And The Pirates'. "Since I can do decent work on automatic," he reasoned, "what would happen if I really killed myself working on a strip?"

True to his word, *Flagg!* was designed from the start to be an intense experience, for both the reader and creator, unlike anything else on the stands. Chaykin found his pages-per-day rate as an artist swiftly halved, as the strip's themes, subject, characters and story took a hold.

"I'm a very liberal guy," he explained in a contemporary interview, "politically and socially. At the same time, I'm flaming patriotic. I feel as if Americanism has been taken from me. It has been co-opted by the Right." This – neatly paralleling the mission his new hero undertakes, trying to put a broken country back together – was Chaykin's chance to take it back.

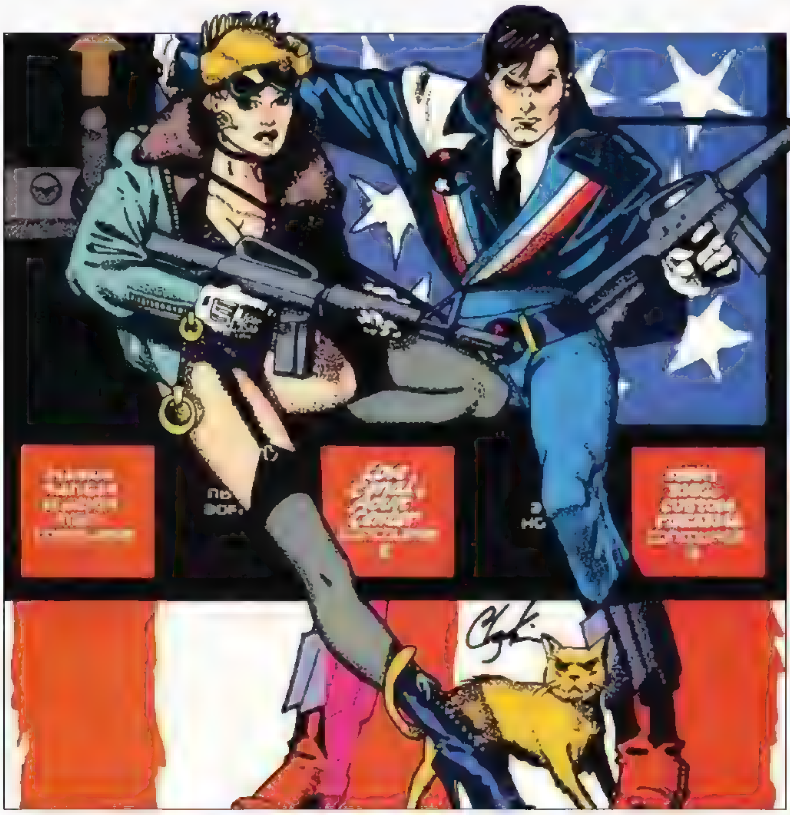
THE YEAR OF THE DOMINO, WHEN EVERYTHING WENT TO HELL!

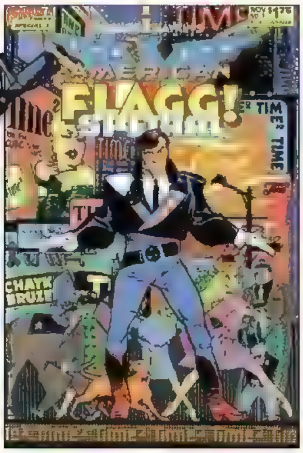
Flagg! tells of a near-future America, bankrupt and broken, with the government fled to Mars, Brazil the new economic and military powerhouse, and the population huddled around gigantic suburban 'Plex-Malls', where they're pacified by drugs, shopping and subliminal TV messages. It's 2031, and Reuben Flagg – handsome, highly-sexed TV cop actor from a suspiciously Leftist family – is replaced on his show, *Mark Thrust: Sexus Ranger*, by a computer-generated copy, and booted from comfy Mars back to a knackered Earth.

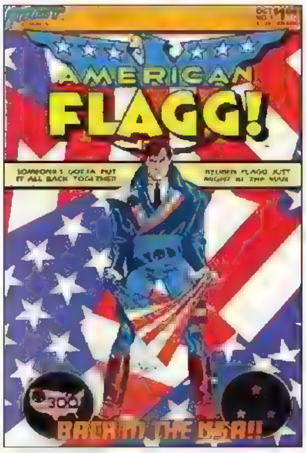
Initially appearing soft and spoiled, Flagg is given a new job – almost unheard of in this work-light future – as deputy Ranger at the Chicago Plex-Mall, where sex will be easy, corruption endemic, and (the powers that be figure) he'll soon disappear, lost in the hubbub. But the Mars government is remote, their secret plans to sell off the USA well underway, and they haven't quite reckoned for the inflammable cocktail of spies and street gangs, secret agendas and individual ambition, now gathering in Chicago; worse, they've underestimated the pluck and drive of a certain reject TV star.

The thing that's most striking about *Flagg!*, even now, is just how sophisticated it is. There's a vast cast – created, Chaykin explained, so he had enough people to eventually take sides when all-out conflict comes – and even the good guys are deeply flawed; meanwhile, the references to riots and designer drugs, revolutions and plagues, remain painfully relevant.

"I'm the child of Depression-era parents," Chaykin would explain. "*Flagg!* is about the next depression, as opposed to the one we're looking at now." Reading the comic today, and ignoring the advanced robotics and



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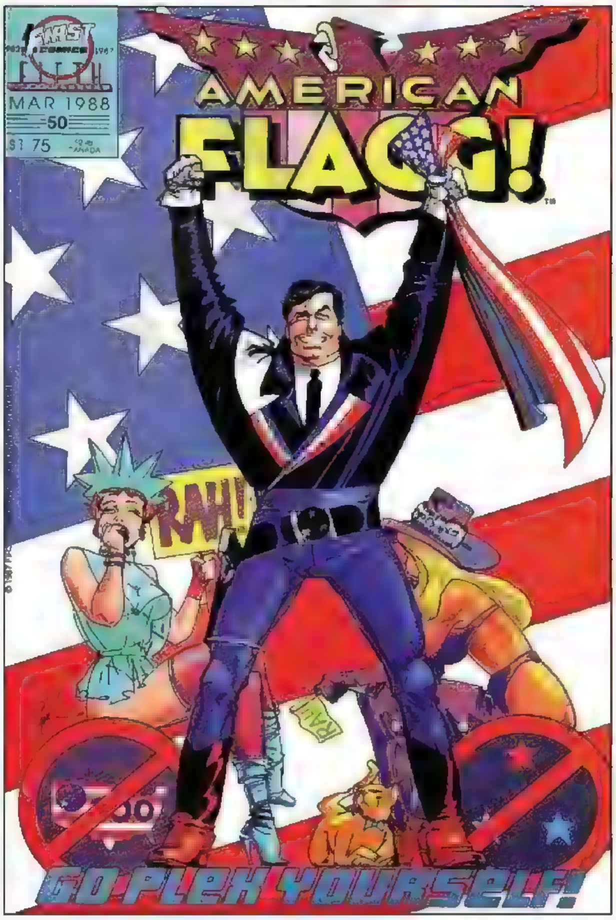
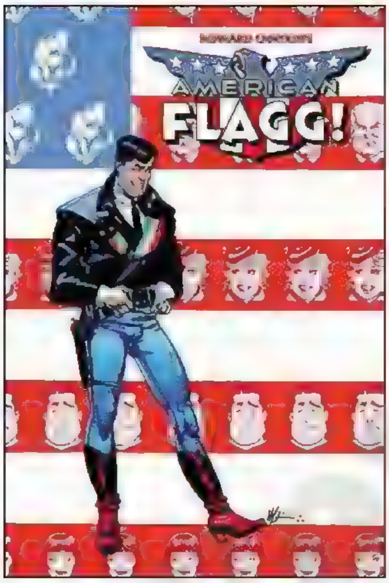
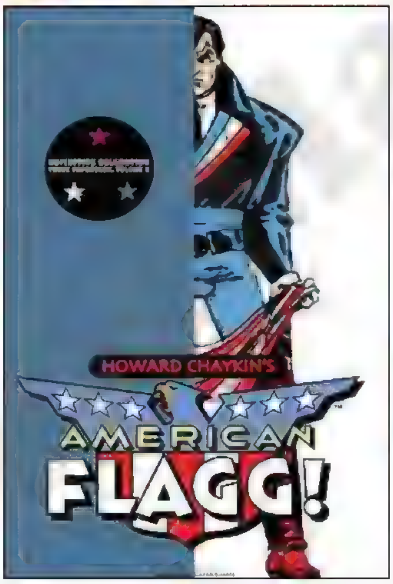
FLAGG!
BACK IN THE USA!!







Top left: Reuben Flagg – a man whom circumstance has changed mightily

Above right: Chaykin's unmistakable art adorns every cover.

occasional space travel, you can't help wondering if we might not be living in Flagg's world – sure, like everyone, Chaykin missed mobile phones and the social media that rides on them, and he added talking cats (brilliantly, Raul, Flagg's chatty moggy sidekick, is never fully explained), but most things he got frighteningly, thrillingly right.

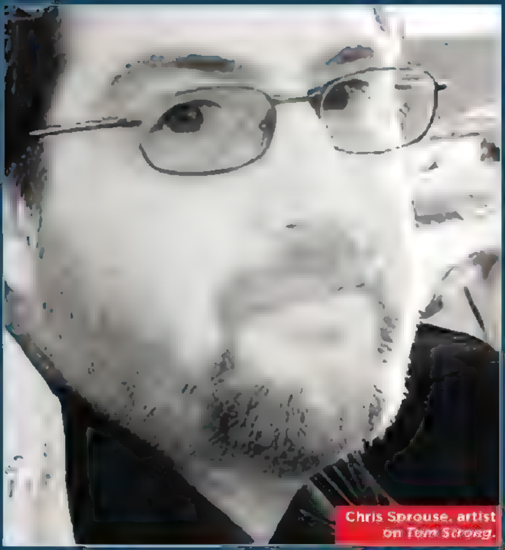
Beyond clever, complex plots, and characters more rounded and intriguingly contradictory than those in almost any current comic, the other between-the-eyes pow! of *American Flagg!* comes from its inventive, bravura storytelling: incredible sound-effects (Buzzzzotz! go the buzz-knucks), complex page-layouts, and the most inventive array of storytelling techniques since Eisner's *The Spirit*. Whatever else they may be, these are comics with real éclat.

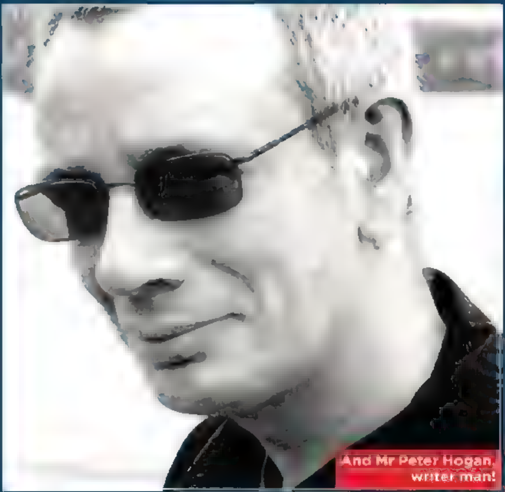
"ONCE AGAIN, LIFE IMITATES ART"

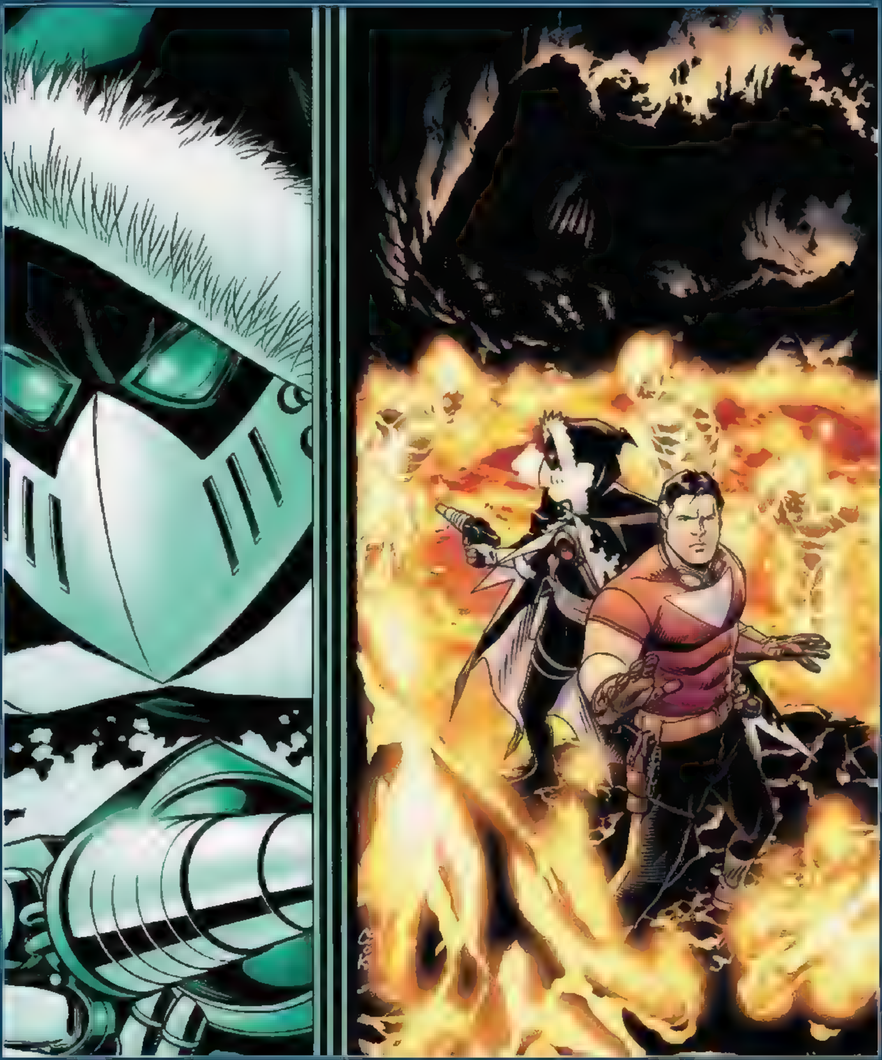
For most, *Flagg!*'s glory period is the first year's intricate continuing storyline, but there's much to be said for the second year too; yes, guest artists do start to appear, but it's mainly pure Chaykin through to #26, these shorter, snappier story arcs allowing him to explore the rest of Flagg's world. Afterwards, with Chaykin still writing but other artists on board, the spark starts to fade away, and when other writers eventually take over – great talents amongst them – none of them can recapture the magic.

By this time, of course, Chaykin had spun off into other projects, notably his unpopular *Time2* series of graphic novels (adventures in a jazz-influenced fantasy New York, well worth digging out), and typically smart, glib, violent reboots of classic heroes such as The Shadow and Blackhawk. All had their moments – as did later works, including the grisly, near-porno Hollywood vampire noir *Black Kiss* – but Chaykin would never again combine his craft and imagination with a compelling comic book hero, his commercial and artistic sides meshing perfectly, quite like he did in *American Flagg!*

Issues #1-14, containing Chaykin's first blockbuster Flagg! story, is easily available as one (expensive) hardcover or a pair of trade paperbacks; reissues of the rest, however, we're still waiting for.


Chris Sprouse, artist on *Tom Strong*.


And Mr Peter Hogan, writer man!



STILL GOING STRONG

Chris Sprouse and Peter Hogan talk to **Stephen Jewell** about taking over from the bard of Northampton on *Tom Strong*

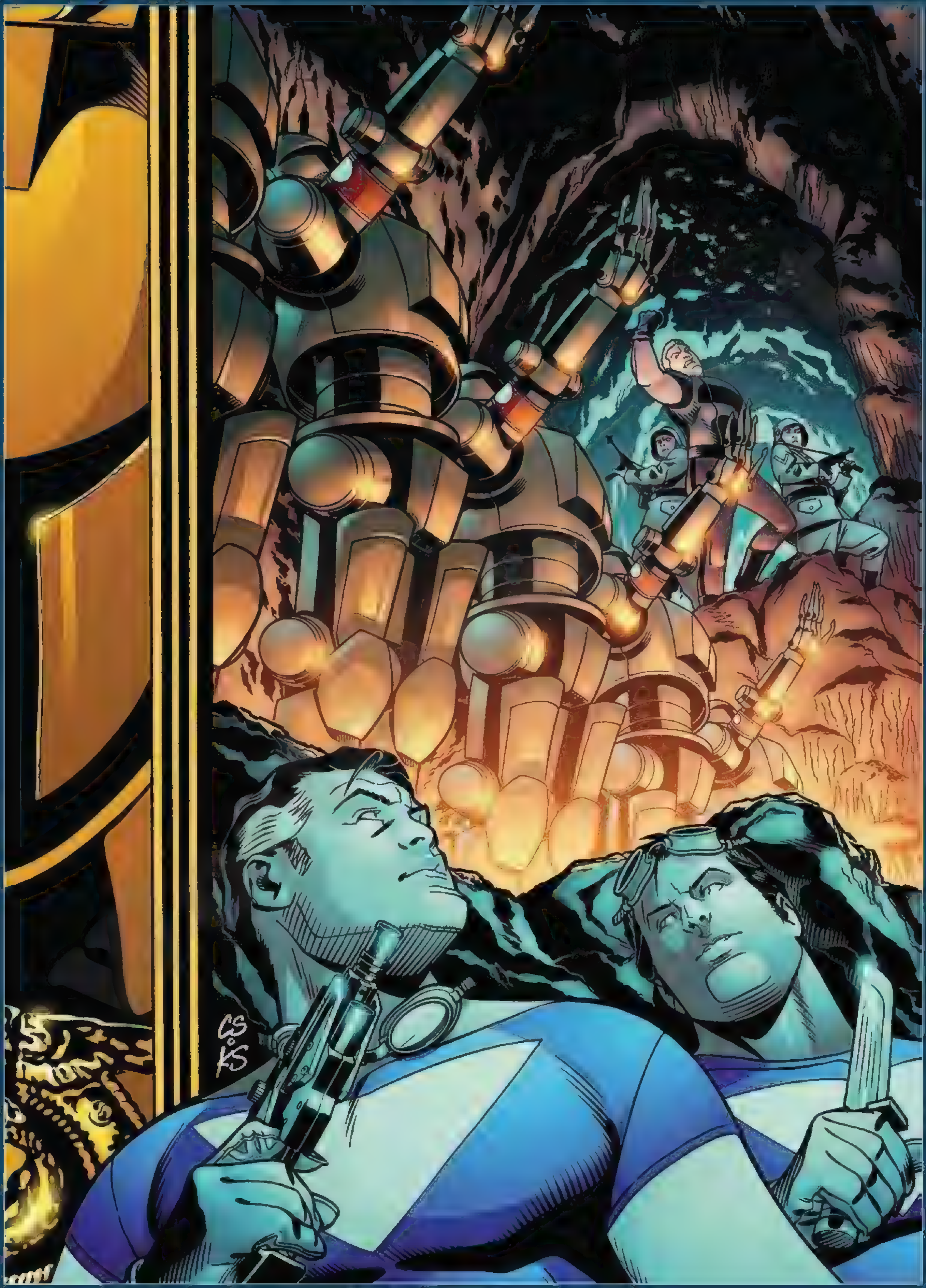
There is surely no harder act to follow in comic books than the mighty Alan Moore. But aided by the continuing presence of co-creator Chris Sprouse, Peter Hogan has done a remarkably smooth job of stepping into the Northampton mage's considerable shoes on *Tom Strong*, first scripting three issues of the regular monthly series and contributing to 2003's *The Many Worlds Of Tesla Strong* special, before penning last year's *Robots Of Doom* miniseries.

"The biggest compliment I've had – and I've had a few – was that people didn't realise that Alan wasn't writing *Tom Strong* anymore," says Hogan, when we meet up with him and Sprouse during the Ohio-based artist's recent trip to London. "They couldn't tell that it wasn't Alan," he added.

[illegible]

Sprouse agrees, insisting there is no difference between Hogan and Moore's respective versions. "The characters feel like they're supposed to and I've never thought 'that character wouldn't do that'," he explains. "That's what I like about it and these have been some of my favourite issues. My goal is to get down on paper what I see in my head after reading the scripts. I've had more success with the jobs I've worked on with Peter than with anything else and I'm very happy with most of *Robots Of Doom*. I'm usually really critical of my own work but I'd be hard pressed to find something in it that makes me cringe."

Alongside *Top Ten*, *Promethea* and *Tomorrow Stories*, *Tom Strong* is part of Wildstorm's America's Best Comics imprint, which was established in the late '90s before the former Image division was sold to DC in 1999. After creating some of the most ubiquitous comics of the 1980s in *Swamp Thing*, *Watchmen* and *Batman: The Killing Joke*, Moore acrimoniously severed ties with the mainstream industry in the early '90s after falling out with DC over copyright and merchandising issues. However, he was eventually persuaded to continue helming



Tom Strong Images © DC Comics

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Chris Sprouse ponders *Stormwatch*.

the ABC line if the New York publishing giant was kept at a discreet distance. "We'd first started working on the books a year or two before they were published," recalls Sprouse. "But there were delays as we were trying to sort out all the legal work and it took forever for Alan to decide that he would stay. All of the artists drew their first issues and then we had to get other jobs before Wildstorm got around to launching the series."

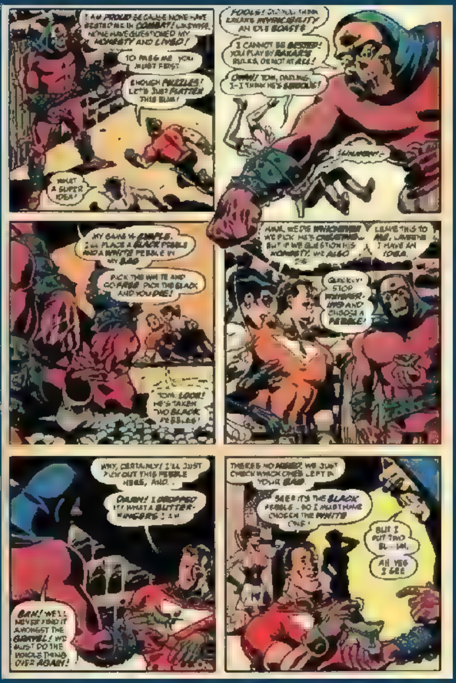
While *Top Ten* brought a police procedural element to the superhero team book and *Promethea* embarked upon a more esoteric, personal direction, *Tom Strong* appeared to hark back to some golden past, referencing classic science heroes such as Doc Savage. "A lot of people have picked up on the pulp aspects of *Tom Strong* but for me it was always just as much about the Silver Age," says Hogan. "There were other influences such as *Tintin*, as Alan once told me, and once you know that you can see it."

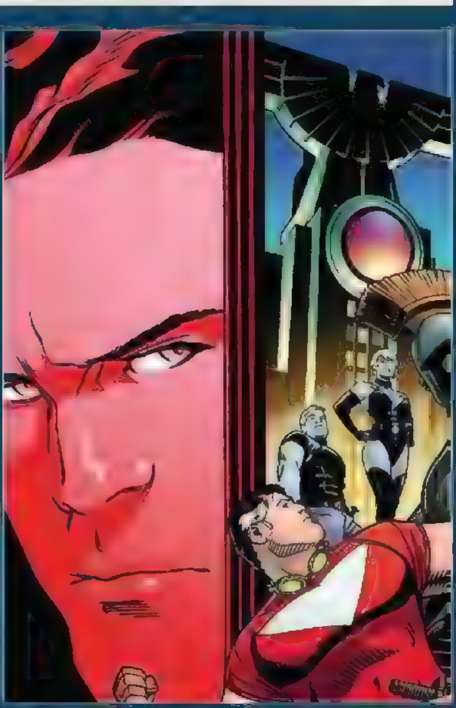
"Part of it was deliberately visual as well," adds Sprouse. "When we first started ABC, Alan asked all the artists what we wanted to draw and what sort of comic we've always wanted to do. He also asked us what our favourite books and comics were and *Tintin* is one of mine."

[illegible]

Writing the first 24 issues of *Tom Strong*'s 36-issue run before returning for the final instalment, Moore departed DC for good in 2005. However, he was happy to leave Tom Strong in Hogan's capable hands.

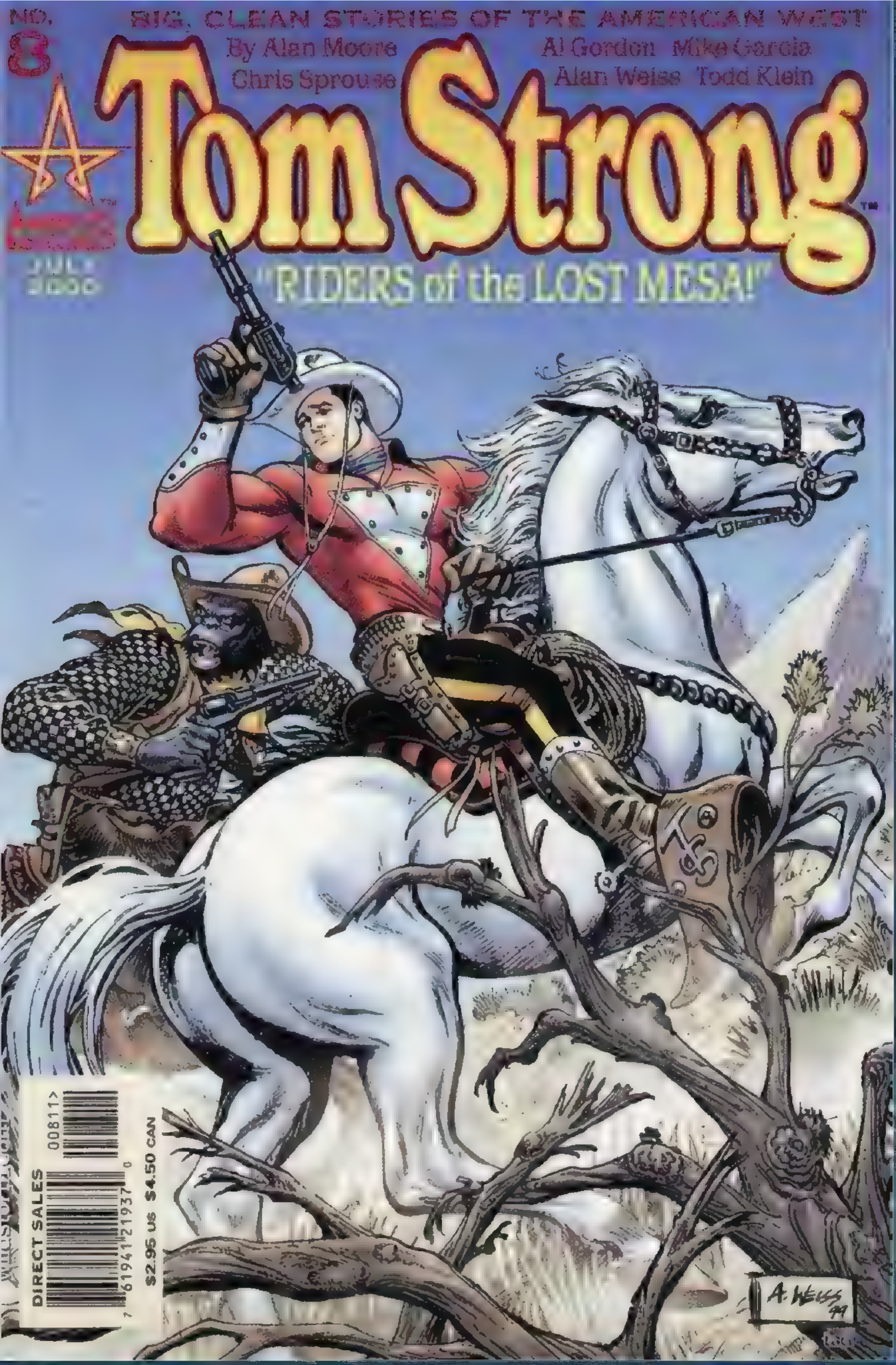
"Alan is out of the picture now but when I was asked to resurrect Tom a few years ago, I wanted to make sure that it was okay with him first," says Hogan. "I don't think either Chris or myself would have wanted to proceed without his blessing, but fortunately for us he didn't mind. I also think I know Tom as well as it's possible to know him, and I feel an enormous amount of affection for all the characters, which I hope comes across."


WHAT A SUPER IDEA!
TO PASS ME YOU MUST FIRST
ENOUGH PUZZLES! LET'S JUST FLATTEN THIS BUM!
I CANNOT BE BESTED! YOU PLAY BY BARAK'S RULES OR NOT AT ALL!
MY GAME IS SIMPLE. I'LL PLACE A BLACK PEBBLE AND A WHITE PEBBLE IN MY BAG
PICK THE WHITE AND GO FREE. PICK THE BLACK AND YOU DIE!
TOM, LOOK! HE'S TAKEN TWO BLACK PEBBLES!
LEAVE THIS TO ME, I HAVE AN IDEA.
QUICKLY! STOP WHISPERING AND CHOOSE A PEBBLE!
WHY, CERTAINLY! I'LL JUST PICK OUT THIS PEBBLE HERE, AND...
OHHH! I DROPPED IT! WHAT A BUTTER-FINGERS I AM
BAH! WE'LL NEVER FIND IT AMONGST THE GRAVEL! WE MUST DO THE WHOLE THING OVER AGAIN!
SEE? IT'S THE BLACK PEBBLE - SO I MUST HAVE CHOSEN THE WHITE ONE!
BUT I PUT TWO BL- UH...
AH YES I SEE



A former journalist for magazines such as *Uncut* and the editor of Fleetway's short-lived *Revolver*, Hogan originally met Moore in the late '80s, interviewing him after *Watchmen*'s historical publication. He's stayed in touch with him ever since. "When I started writing comics 21 years ago, I'd send Alan the occasional thing that I'd written that I was really pleased with, and he'd told me he liked some of them," recalls Hogan. "Then a year or so after ABC started he said in some interview that he was planning to involve other writers. I told him if he was serious about that, I'd love to be considered – and he very sweetly told me I was already on his shortlist."

Hogan first collaborated with Moore on 2003 miniseries *Terra Obscura*, which took the


NO. 8
BIG, CLEAN STORIES OF THE AMERICAN WEST
By Alan Moore
Chris Sprouse
Al Gordon Mike Garcia
Alan Weiss Todd Klein
Tom Strong
JULY 2000
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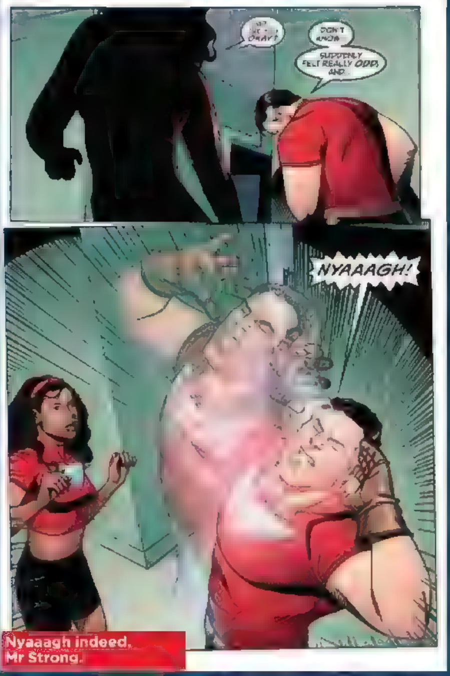
Everyone's favorite science hero returns!
TOM STRONG AND THE ROBOTS OF DOOM
An epic Six-Issue Adventure
Written by PETER HOGAN
Art by CHRIS SPROUSE and KARL STORY
Fall 2009


DON'T KNOW
SUDDENLY FELT REALLY ODD, AND
NYAAAGH!

Nyaaagh indeed, Mr Strong.

I don't think we'd have wanted to proceed without Moore's blessing

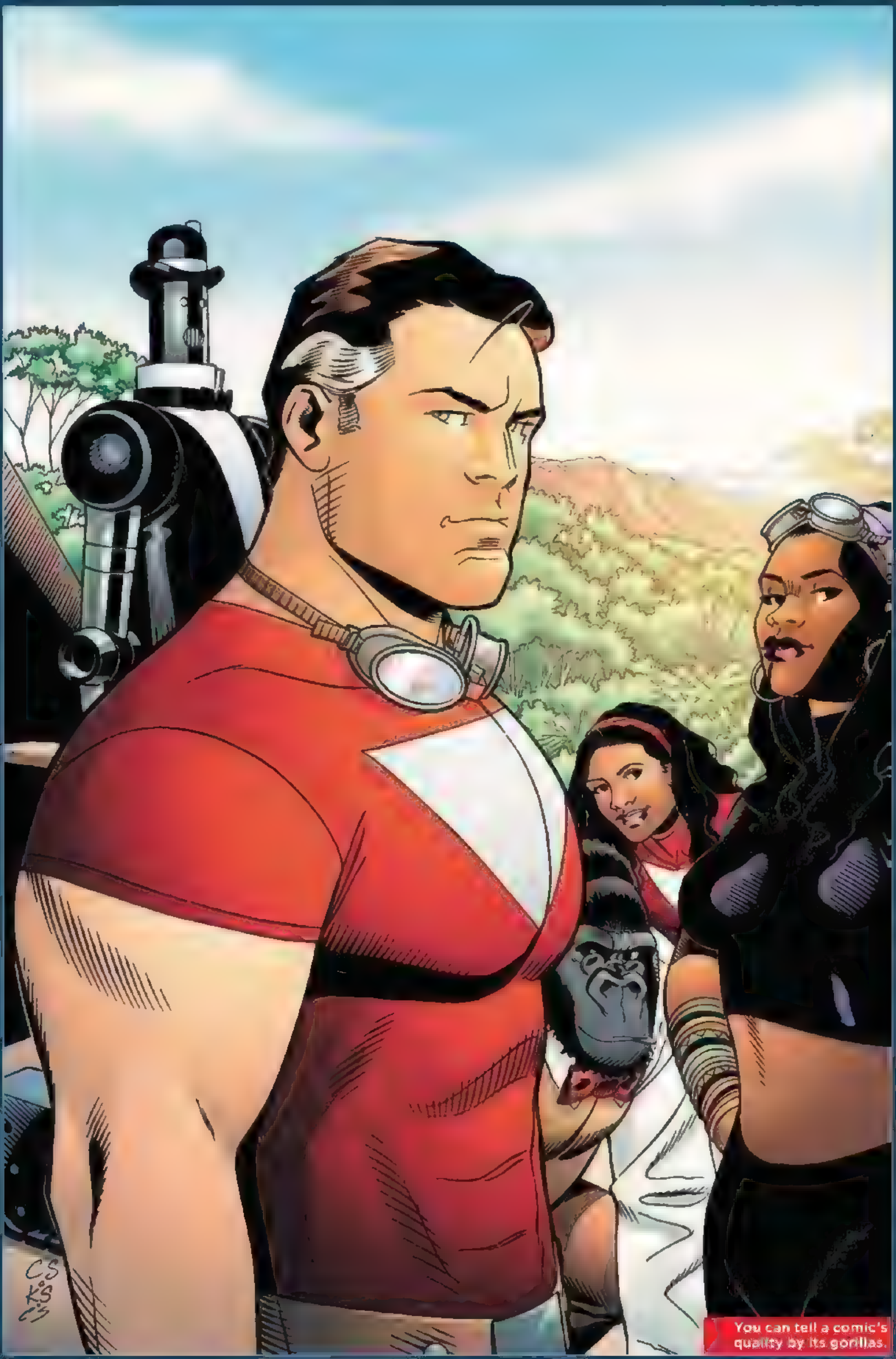
numerous characters that make up the Society of Major American Science Heroes (S.M.A.S.H.) and transplanted them to a far-off planet, which mirrors *Tom Strong*'s Earth. "I'd suggested doing something with the *Terra Obscura* characters, but Wildstorm wouldn't go for it unless Alan was involved," says Hogan. "So Alan offered to co-plot it with me, and then I went off and wrote the scripts. It was an amazing experience for me."

Tom 'Doc' Strange and the rest of S.M.A.S.H. return in Hogan and Sprouse's next six-parter *Tom Strong And The Planet of Peril*, which will be published later this year. "If you've read *Robots Of Doom*, you'll know that Tesla is pregnant at the end, which I thought would be a nice thing to do – to carry on the generations and make Tom a grandfather," says Hogan. "But after a while, I thought that this might not be entirely good news. It might be a life-threatening situation because her husband is a fire creature, so there could be problems. Tom basically comes to the conclusion that the only way that he can save her – the only thing that can save her – lies on the far side of the universe on Terra Obscura."

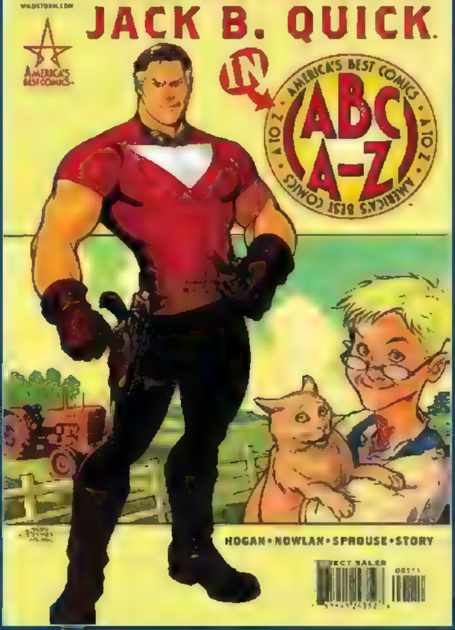
Published by the now defunct Nedor Comics in the 1940s, characters such as the Fighting Spirit and The Ghost now languish in the public domain. "Alex Ross has also been doing stuff with them at Dynamite," says Hogan, referring to Project Superpowers. "I've avoided looking at what's been done over there and just done my own thing."

[illegible]

After returning to Terra Obscura, Tom and family find the once thriving world in bad shape. "Something terrible has happened, although I don't want to give away much more than that," teases Hogan. "At any rate, they have to sort that out before they can deal with Tom's problem and come home. It's very dark and it's a weird one for Tom because it's



You can tell a comic's quality by its gorillas.



Never FEAR, Madam
Everything will be tickety-boo in TWO SHAKES of a LAMB'S TAIL
Possibly an hour and a HALF

> **You're cumulatively influenced by everything you've ever read or seen**

basically a team-up with all those characters. It's also very dark for a *Tom Strong* story. It's like *Heart Of Darkness*, although I promise that it does come out into the light again at the end."

Along with Bojeffries Saga artist Steve Parkhouse, Hogan is venturing into grittier territory on *Resident Alien*, which recently kicked off with a three-part *Dark Horse Presents* tale and will spin out into its own series in the coming months. "It's about an alien who is stuck on earth and has been keeping a low profile until events conspire to draw him out into the community," explains Hogan. "There's a kind of government surveillance aspect as well, as there are people who know the alien's here and are trying to find him. He ends up helping to investigate a series of murders.

"It's a joy to write and Steve's art is wonderful. It's kind of ongoing and we're in for the long term. We're developing the story very slowly and not divulging everything in the first issue, so you're going to have to work at it to figure out what's going on."

[illegible]

Despite both focusing on extraterrestrials who are hunted down by the authorities, Hogan insists that *Resident Alien* isn't a homage to Alan Moore's *2000 AD* classic *Skizz* or indeed Steven Spielberg's seminal *E.T.* "You're cumulatively influenced by everything you've ever read or seen, but I wouldn't have singled out either *Skizz* or *E.T.* in this case, except in the sense that they're both stories where the alien is the good guy," he reasons.

"I think I was probably more influenced by *The Man Who Fell To Earth* and the old *My Favourite Martian* TV show. It's a weird one in that because it's a mixture of sci-fi and crime/mystery, the influences are coming from two different directions at once. I'd like to think the result is something no one has seen before."

With Hogan declaring, "I certainly think that we could do a lot more," he and Sprouse are also far from done with *Tom Strong*.

"I'd be happy to keep doing it indefinitely," says Sprouse, who compares it to Mike Mignola's *Hellboy*. "Back when he was still drawing it, you'd sometimes get a four or two-issue series or maybe a one-shot but you'd get something every year," he says. "I'd like to see the same thing happening with *Tom Strong*." CH

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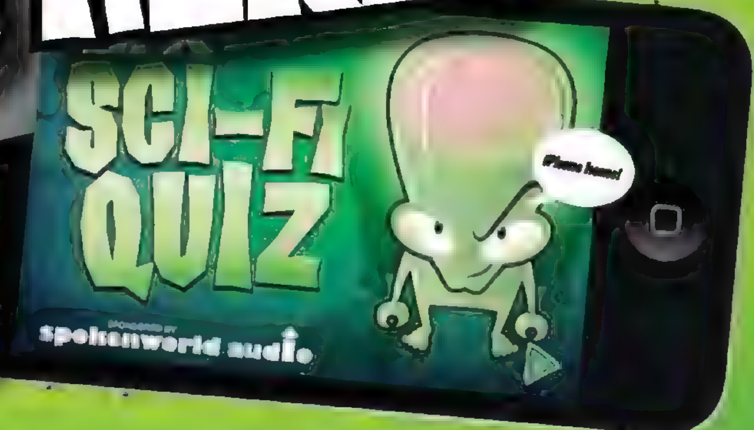

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THE BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO...

GEORGE PÉREZ

At a loss for what to say about this prolific and much-admired superhero artist? Let **James Lovegrove** furnish you with a fistful of knowledge...

Some would call George Pérez the quintessential superhero artist. He's drawn just about every major capes'n'tights character for the Big Two (Marvel and DC) and most of their minor ones as well, and contributed significant runs to top-tier titles such as *Avengers*, *Fantastic Four*, *JLA* and *New Teen Titans*. His particular speciality is team books and he seems to delight in cramming as many figures into a single panel as is humanly possible.

Pérez's style combines intricacy, dynamism and elegance. His men are muscular but not absurdly so, his women pneumatic yet strong. His page layouts are busy but never to the point of confusion. Small panels are often inserted between or overlaid on larger ones, counterpointing the action with close-ups and reaction shots and adding a kind of syncopation to the narrative beat.

He's also noted for providing a breathtaking level of detail. You'll see every window of every skyscraper in a Pérez cityscape, every eyelash on an eye, every leaf on a tree. His clouds roil tumultuously. His depiction of rubble is so familiar, so identifiable a part of his artistic vision, it's almost a signature. No one has used 'Kirby krackles' quite so profusely, save Jack Kirby himself. No one can show bursts of energy and swirling cosmic forces with the same dramatic intensity as George Pérez.

Born in the Bronx in 1954 to Puerto Rican immigrant parents, Pérez began his first professional work as a comics artist when he was just 19, working as assistant to Rich Buckler. With writer Bill Mantlo he co-created the White Tiger, a mystical masked martial artist who has the distinction of being America's first Latino superhero, for the Marvel magazine *Deadly Hands Of Kung Fu*. His pencils on that strip, though still a little rough in the composition department, look terrific beneath the line-and-wash inks of Sonny Trinidad.

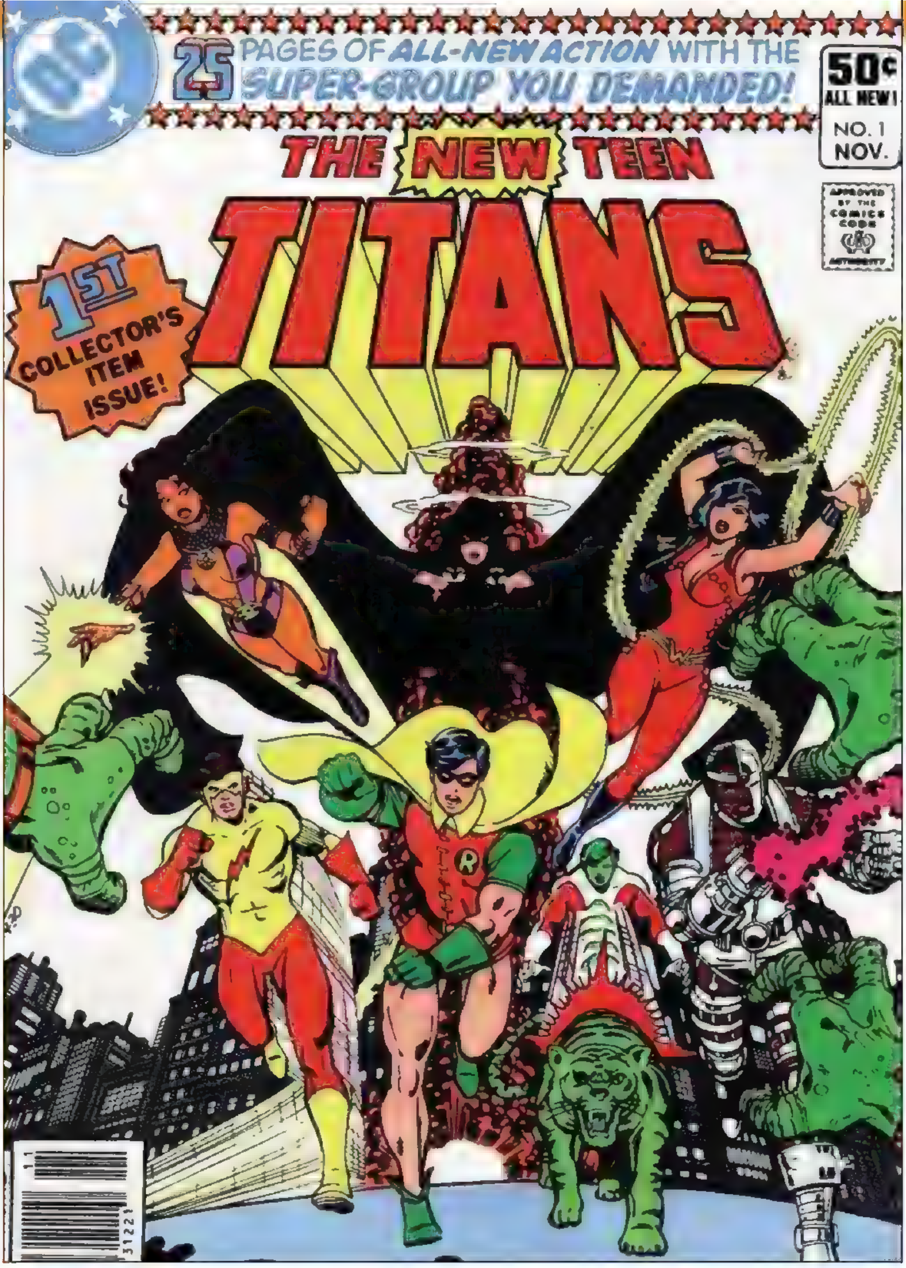
Better was to come, and Pérez soon became the go-to artist for Marvel in the '70s, with a Herculean work ethic, sometimes producing full pencil art for two monthly books simultaneously. He transferred to DC in 1980, where he chalked up two of his greatest critical and commercial successes: *New Teen Titans* and *Crisis On Infinite Earths*. Pérez then turned his attention to *Wonder Woman*, and remained with DC for the rest of the decade.

Having established himself as a prolific and reliable artist for nigh on 20 years, with a reputation for always meeting deadlines, Pérez had a problematic 1990s.

Professional and personal troubles saw him failing to complete projects, and his output became increasingly sporadic. However, the quality of his artwork, when it appeared, remained consistently high.

Pérez is also a writer of note, and invariably collaborates in the plotting of any book he is working on. Currently, he's as busy as he's ever been. His inks grace the pencils of Dan Jurgens on DC's latest relaunch of *Green Arrow*, a good match of styles. He is also providing scripts, layouts and inks on *Superman*.

Given Pérez's immense oeuvre, choosing a handful of representative examples is no mean feat. But here goes anyway... »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NO. 1 NOV.
THE NEW TEEN TITANS
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
1ST COLLECTOR'S ITEM ISSUE!

THE HUGELY POPULAR ONE: NEW TEEN TITANS

In the wake of Marvel's runaway triumph with Claremont and Byrne's *X-Men*, DC was keen for its own team-book hit. It found it in *New Teen Titans*, which followed the template of revamping an existing set of superheroes, adding a few new ones, and concentrating as much on character interplay as villain-battling.

As integral to the book's success as Marv Wolfman's angst-filled scripts, was Pérez's pencilling, given extra polish and sparkle by the inks of Romeo Tanghal. It's worth noting that when Pérez left, the quality of the plots declined sharply. His contribution, like Byrne's to *X-Men*, was more than just that of illustrator. He was co-storyteller.

The original issues have all been collected, and also to be recommended is the hardcover *Teen Titans* graphic novel *Games*, which Pérez started work on in 1986 and resumed pencilling in 2004, and which finally came out in the autumn of 2011. Pérez's artwork benefits greatly from being inked by himself, Al Vey and *Comic Heroes*' own Mike Perkins, and even if the book's lengthy genesis means the plotline feels as if it has been cobbled together somewhat in order to suit the differing tones of different eras, it's still a great read.

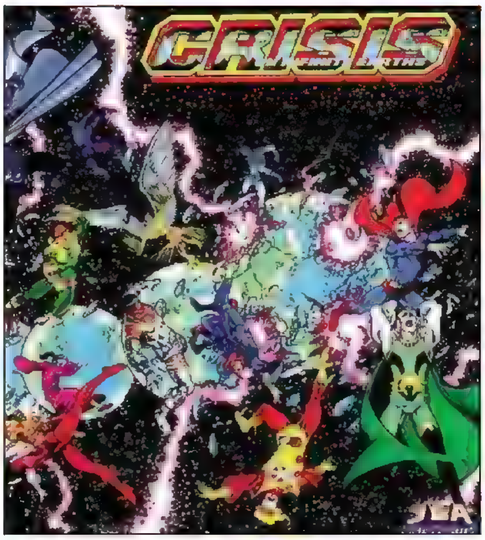
THE MOVIE ADAPTATION THAT'S BETTER THAN THE MOVIE ITSELF: LOGAN'S RUN

Logan's Run, the film, is a charming piece of mid-'70s low-budget SF cheese. Everyone knows the concept: a dystopic world in which no one is allowed to live past the age of 30.

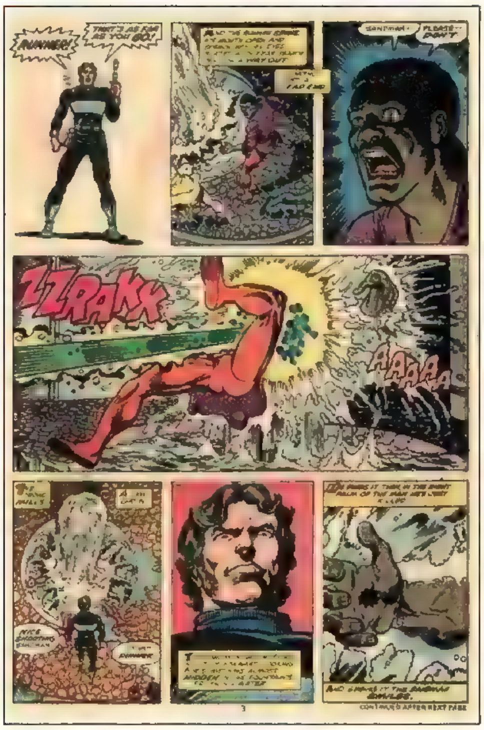
Logan's Run, the five-issue Marvel comic adaptation, surprises in that it improves on its source material, rather than being a pale imitation. Much of the credit for that can be laid at Pérez's feet. The movie is hampered by cheap model work and ropey special effects, but a comics artist has no such limitations and Pérez brings depth and a sophisticated sheen.

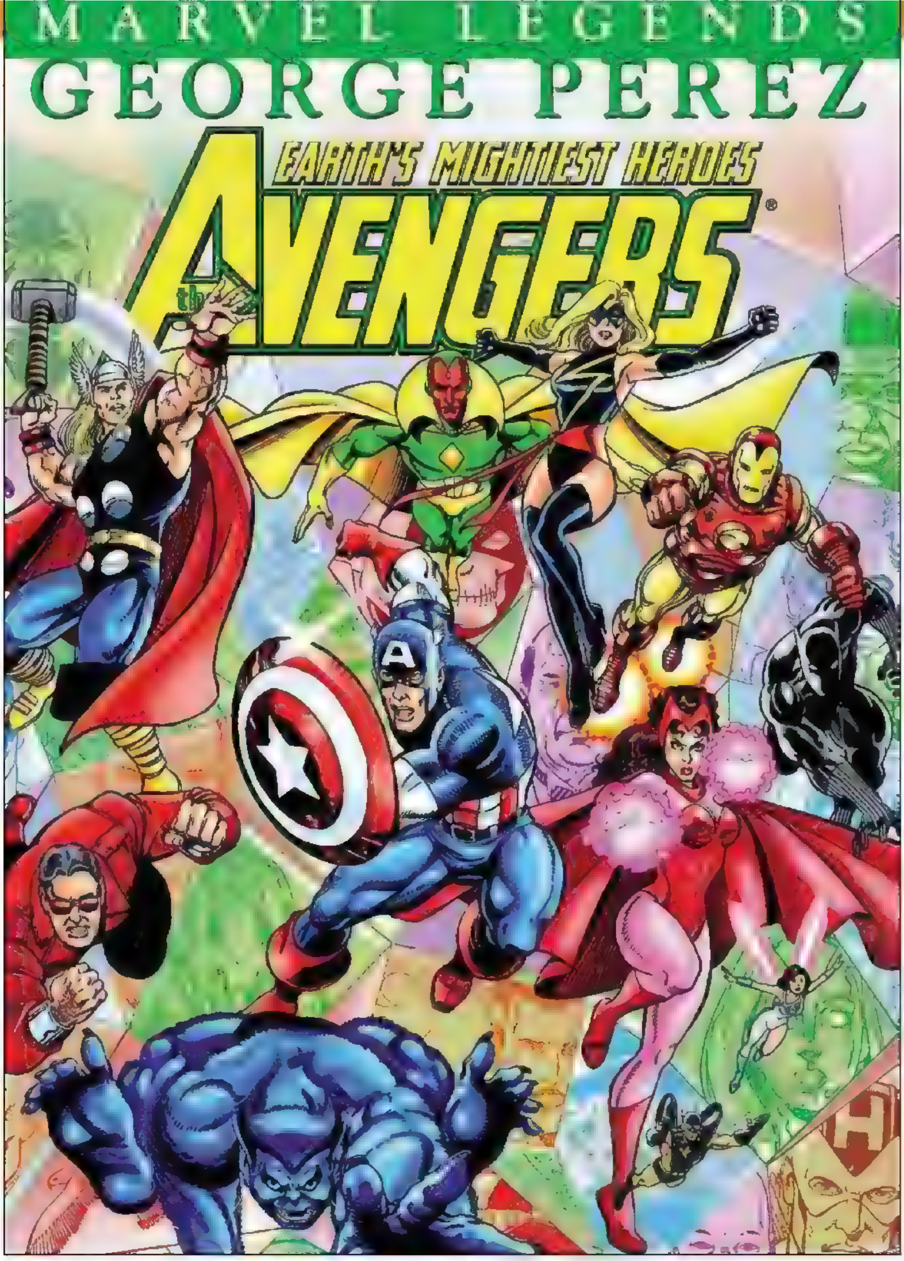
The inking is by Klaus Janson, which may seem like an odd pairing given that Janson prefers a rough brushstroke and Pérez's pencil lines are always very precise and clean, but in the event they mesh well together. Although it has never been collected in a trade paperback edition, most likely owing to copyright wrangles, a complete run of the comic can be picked up relatively cheaply on certain online auction sites.

THE EPIC ONE: CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS



This 12-issue maxi-series, which came out in 1985, was intended to refine and redefine the DCU's convoluted continuity once and for all, getting rid of all those multiple parallel earths and fusing them into a single consistent whole. Along the way, certain characters were given the chop, among them Supergirl and the Barry Allen incarnation of The Flash. Who better to illustrate Marv Wolfman's millennia-spanning, universe-shaking script than his *Teen Titans* collaborator Pérez? Who else could illustrate high-stakes drama and tragedy on such a grandiose scale? Printing problems with the first issue meant that the original art wasn't reproduced to its best advantage, but thereafter it was page after page of stunning, ultra-detailed wonderment, with Pérez proving he could draw just about anything – any world, any image, any historical era – that was thrown at him. *Crisis* is best enjoyed in its oversized *Absolute Edition*, so that the majesty of Pérez's pencils, not to mention Dick Giordano's diligent inking, may be fully appreciated.





THE ONE THAT PUT EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES BACK IN THE SPOTLIGHT: AVENGERS

Pérez pencilled several issues of *Avengers* in the '70s and returned to the title in the late '90s, in the company of writer Kurt Busiek. This run, comprising the first 34 issues of the title's third incarnation, is held in high esteem by *Avenger*-philes. It respects the long, sometimes chequered history of the team and at the same time moves things forward, introducing new members and readjusting old-school villains, such as Ultron and Kang, into serious, hard-hitting threats.

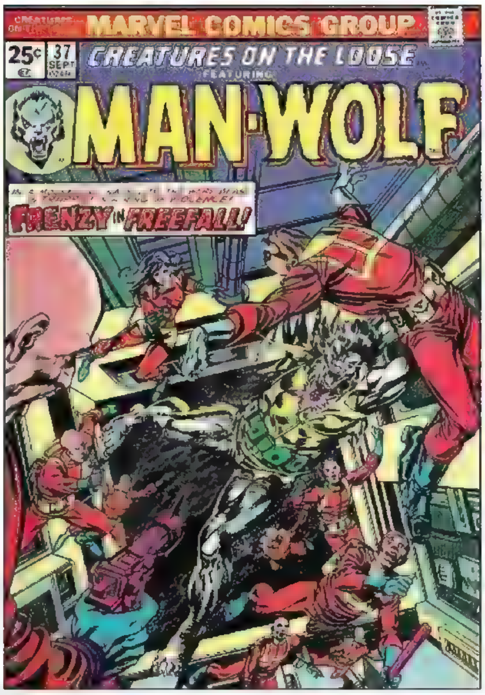
Pérez's art achieves new levels of lavishness and complexity, to match Busiek's polished scripts. It's also worth mentioning that this same writer/artist team finally managed to reignite a project that had begun life in the '80s and had then stalled owing to contractual and editorial disagreements: a *JLA/Avengers* crossover. The four-issue prestige format miniseries that Busiek and Pérez gave us in 2003 centres on a scavenger hunt for a dozen power artefacts from both universes and finds plenty of excuses to put the two teams at one another's throats before uniting them in one final supreme cosmos-saving effort. It is, frankly, a fanboy's wet dream.

THE ONE PÉREZ SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN BORN TO DRAW: WONDER WOMAN

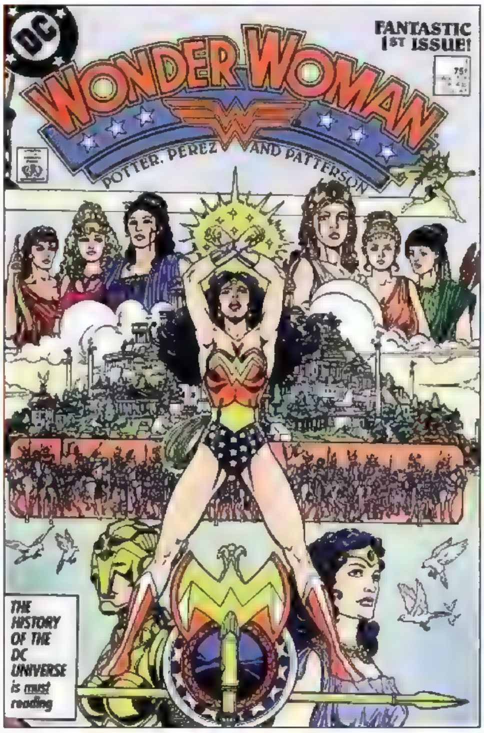
In the late '80s, *Wonder Woman* was a pariah title, the book which nobody wanted to work on but which DC had to keep publishing because she was a flagship character and so well known. Pérez stepped up to the plate, volunteering not only to draw the Amazon princess's adventures but to write them as well.

At first he provided plots dialogued and captioned by the likes of Greg Potter and Len Wein, but with *#16* he assumed full writing chores and turned in some excellent and memorable stories. His depictions of Wonder Woman's home island Themyscira and the Greek gods' palaces on Olympus are sumptuous, full of Doric columns and monumental statuary and, in the case of Olympus, gravity-defying Escher-esque staircases going in all directions, even upside down. What Pérez did best of all, though, was reaffirm Wonder Woman's roots in the ancient Greek myths, giving the character a heft and a credibility she'd hitherto lacked.

THE BONKERS BRONZE AGE MARVEL ONE: MAN-WOLF



One of the oddest additions to '70s Marvel's roster of monster-superheroes was the lycanthropic Man-Wolf. He first appeared in eight issues of anthology series *Creatures On The Loose*, and the best of these (#33-37) are scripted by Dave Kraft and drawn by Pérez. The comic was cancelled and the storyline was left unfinished until three years later, when Kraft and Pérez completed it in two issues of tryout title *Marvel Premiere*. The combination of SF and the supernatural works unusually well, and in the concluding *Marvel Premiere* issues Kraft even throws sword-and-sorcery into the mix. The run has yet to be collected, but the comics themselves are worth tracking down and shouldn't cost you an arm and a leg. **CH**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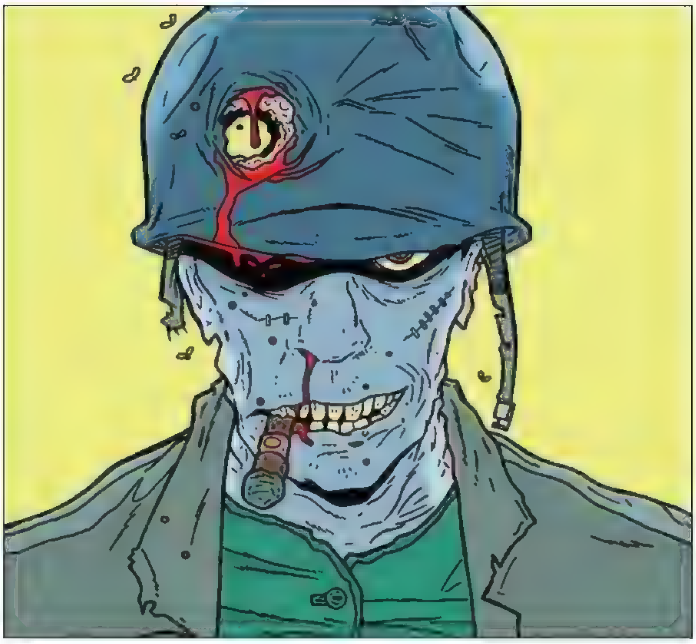
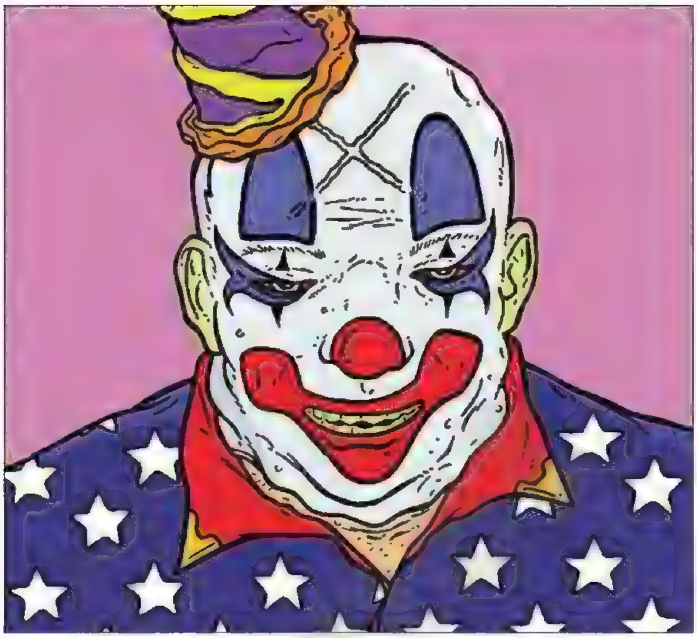




THE COFFIN THEY CARRY YOU OFF IN

David Hine and Shaky Kane prise open *The Bulletproof Coffin* and beckon **Stephen Jewell** inside for a peek at its very weird world

From Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' seminal *Watchmen* to Peter Milligan and Duncan Fegredo's under-rated *Enigma*, there have been many revisionist superhero dramas over the years. None, though, have approached the much maligned genre with the gleefully trashy abandon of David Hine and Shaky Kane's *The Bulletproof Coffin* and its just released follow-up *The Bulletproof Coffin: Disinterred*.

Resembling a four-coloured cross between David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* and Philip K Dick's transcendental sci-fi, the 2009 original Image series was ostensibly the story of self-confessed culture vulture Steve Newman. The Void's contractor is embroiled in a labyrinthine conspiracy involving the supposedly fictional superhero stable of the long defunct Golden Nugget Comics, after he stumbles across some vintage titles in the home of a deceased recluse that he is clearing out, a seemingly far-fetched urban myth that is actually based on true circumstances.

"That's actually a real job. I read a local newspaper story about the council sending a Void's contractor around to this guy's house because he'd died and had no relatives," says Hine. "They cleaned out the house and just dumped everything but they'd got the wrong house and actually threw out the possessions of someone who was still alive. When I read that, I realised that there are these guys who go to people's houses and dump everything – because they're not allowed to keep it or sell it, it all has to go into landfill. If I was doing that job and came across a stack of incredibly rare comic books, there's no way I could stick them in landfill so I could really identify with the character basically nicking stuff."

Soon Steve is drawn into a phantasmagorical web of dream sequences, historical comic book extracts and stories within stories, leaving the reader – and even the authors themselves – unable to distinguish between what is apparently real and what is not.

"I'm really fascinated with that idea," says Hine. "You can see it in TV shows and novels. I've just read Haruki Murakami's latest novel *1Q84*, which is about sliding between the gaps between alternate realities. There's stuff in there that's very close to some of the things we've got in *Bulletproof Coffin: Disinterred*. There are all these coincidences and you start to see things that you're writing being reflected in other things. But what really is fiction? I'm not really sure anymore. My brain is slowly getting wired to all this digital media and you do start to lose touch with reality."

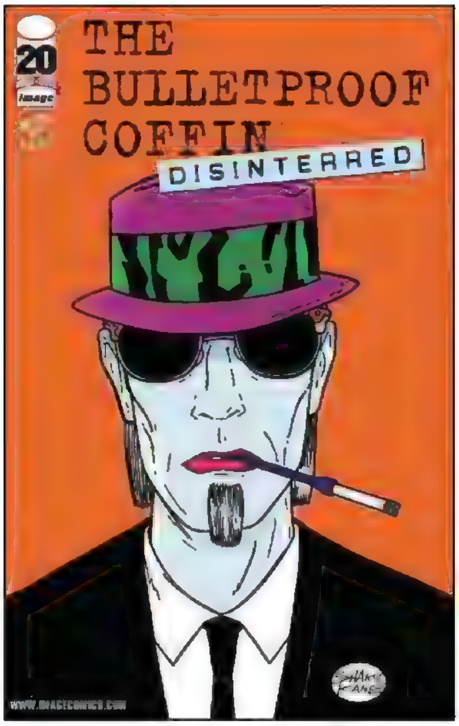
Now based in south London, Hine first met Kane when he was a student at Exeter Art College in the late '70s. Although both contributed to college magazine *Joe Public Comics*, *The Bulletproof Coffin*, nearly 30 years later, represents their first collaboration. "We met in a punk club and ended up rooming in the same house," he recalls. "We had a lot of common interests as we were both into punk music, comics and B-movies – junk culture basically."

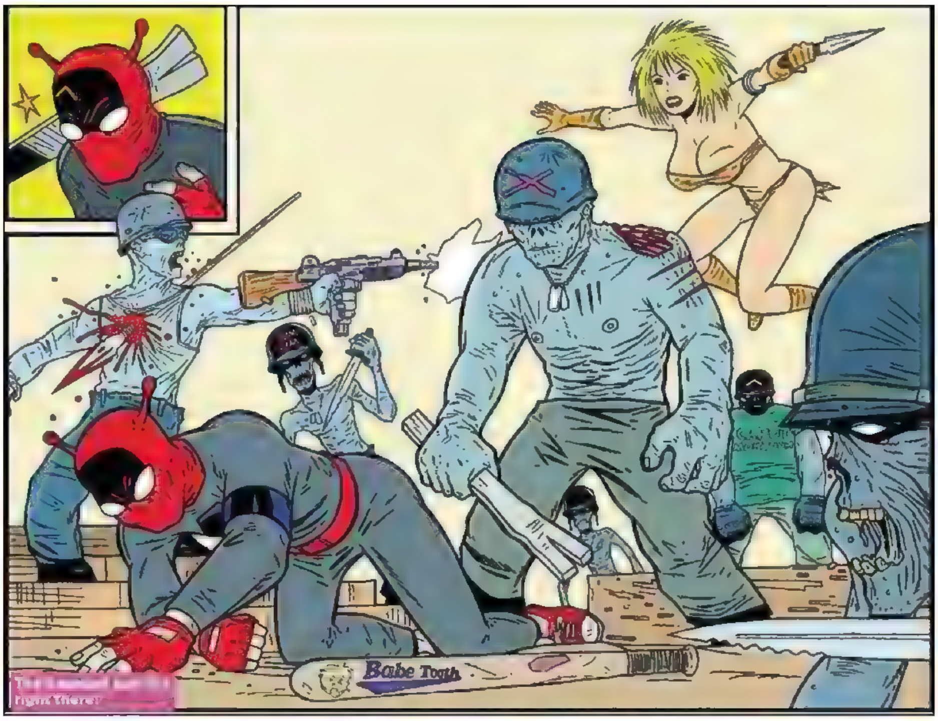
With its day-glo spandex and EC-style horror, *The Bulletproof Coffin* is a shameless celebration of the essential disposability of popular entertainment. "We're trying to raise the junkiest of junk culture to a highbrow level," says Hine wryly. "Either that or

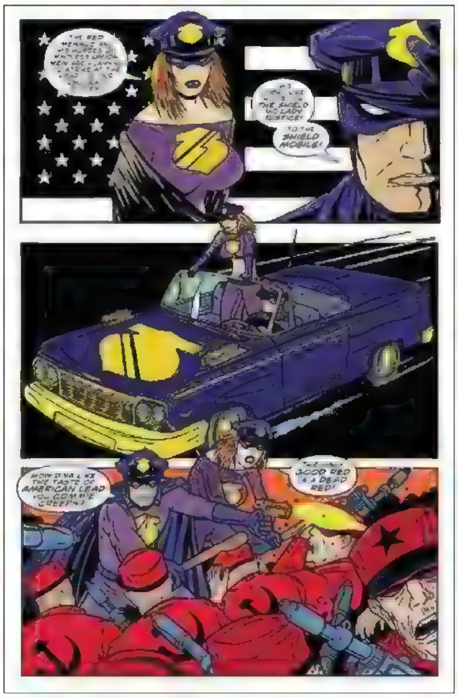
»

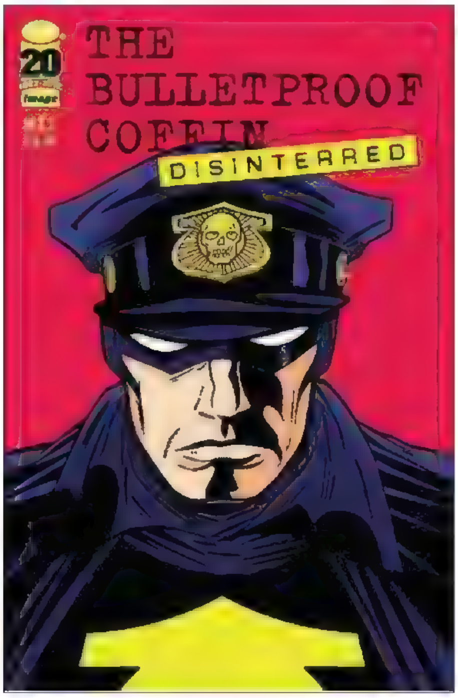
[illegible] Kane (right). Smile.

All images © David Hine and Shaky Kane






TO THE SHIELD MOBILE!
HOW D'YA LIKE THE TASTE OF AMERICAN LEAD YOU COMMIE CREEPS?
GOOD RED A DEAD RED!



“#5 will tell the story of zombie veterans the Hateful Dead as a series of bubblegum cards”

we're reducing highbrow to junk. But I don't actually differentiate between high, middle and lowbrow. You just go with whatever you're into."

It also boasts an elusive autobiographical element: like with Grant Morrison in *Animal Man*, Hine and Kane metafictionally appear in the pages of *The Bulletproof Coffin*, although the mysterious cult writer and artist team that Steve encounters are very different to their real-life counterparts.

"I'm not going to go into how much of it is true and how much of it isn't," says Hine. "It's become really weird because we've created these fictional characters and there are all kinds of levels and we both now have these alter-egos. Shaky did a documentary, *Shaky Kane – Unravelled*, for which he created yet another personality, who is not quite the fictional Shaky or the real Shaky. It becomes really confusing because you never quite know who you are when you're doing interviews. He's a schizophrenic with a split personality, basically."

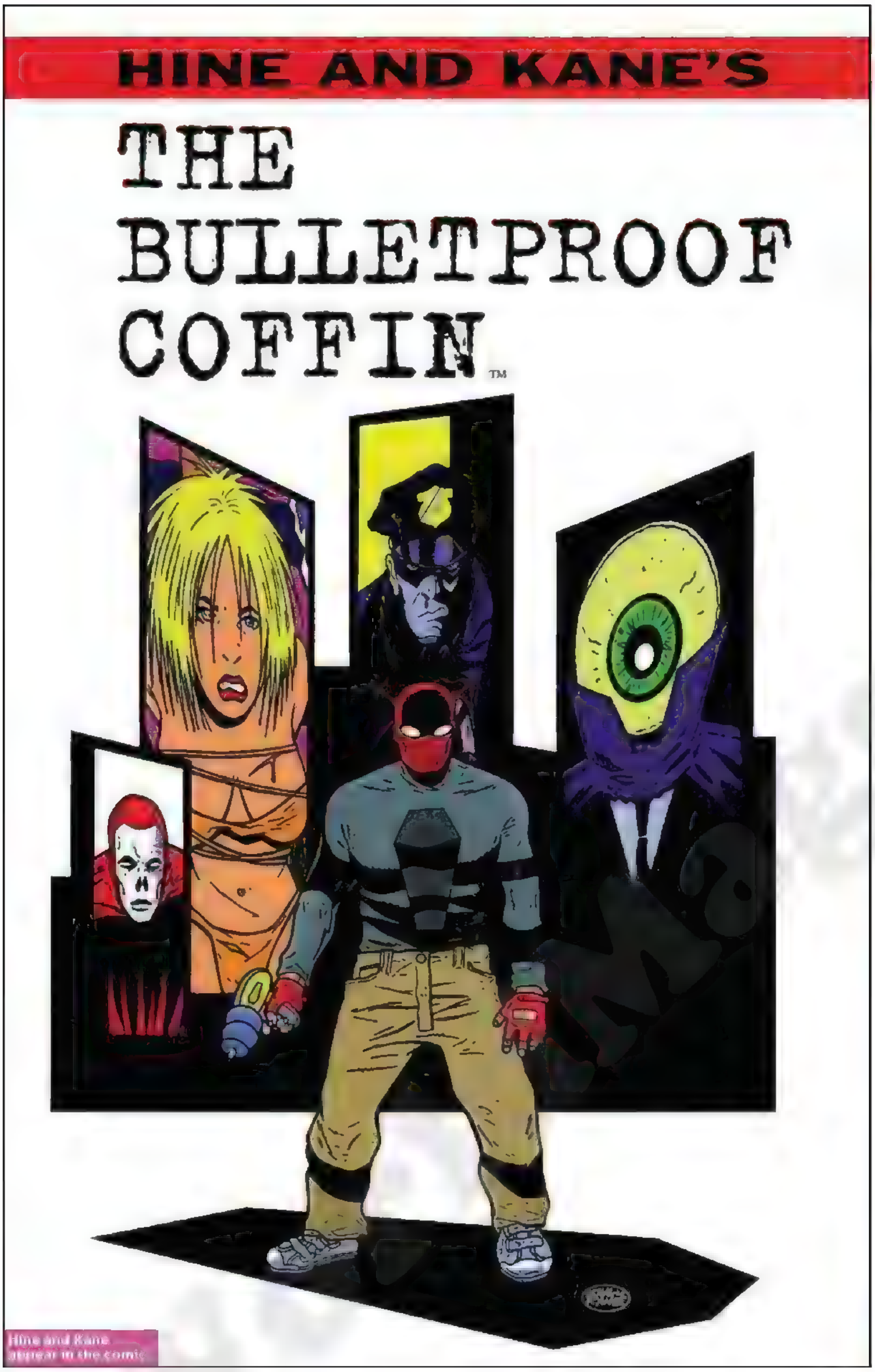
"I've always had an affinity with characters who are larger than life," adds Kane, whose real name is Michael Coulthard. "As a teenager, I was always attracted to the image of the recording artist as much as the music. I could never buy an album if I didn't like the cover art, and I certainly wouldn't read a comic book if I didn't like the art. It's always fun to mess around with self image. Going back all those years, that was the reason I got speaking to David in the first place as he had a cool Sid Vicious thing on. Of course, I'm not really Shaky Kane, so what should this Shaky Kane character look like?"

In *The Bulletproof Coffin*, the two creators fall out after Hine sells out to 'The Big Two', a scenario mirrored in reality with the writer having scripted the House of Idea's 2004 mutant title *District X* before enjoying stints on *Spawn* and *Detective Comics*, amongst other bestselling titles.

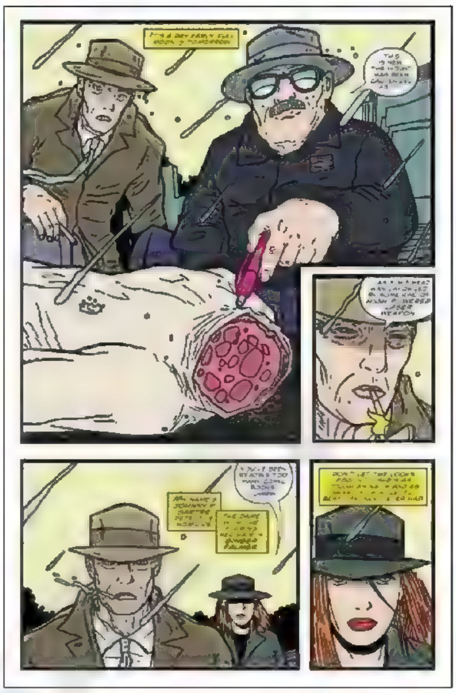
"I've always preferred to do creator owned work but I haven't done an awful lot of it," says Hine, who rose to prominence writing and illustrating 1993 horror comic *Strange Embrace* for Kevin Eastman's ill-fated Atomeka Press.

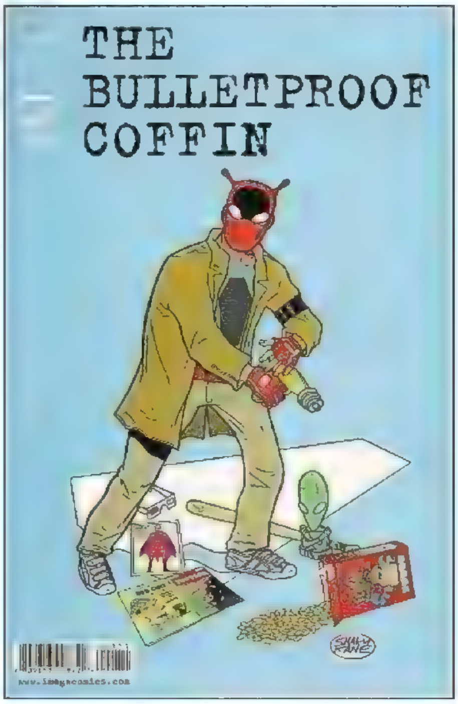
"It was strange to end up doing so much work for Marvel and DC. In 1995 I gave up doing comics – I'd lost interest in American mainstream comics, certainly superhero comics – and I didn't do anything until I was approached by Marvel in 2004. So to be offered an X book and then getting to write *Batman* for DC was really weird. It was great to work on those iconic characters but at the same time it was incredibly restrictive and frustrating because you're playing with these corporate properties that exist not only as comics but also as games and movies. I've always encouraged people to go into creator-owned books because you own everything and you have a lot more creative freedom."

But while he has yet to work for DC since the advent of the New 52, Hine has not totally forsaken commercial comics as he takes over Top Cow's *The Darkness* from



Hine and Kane appear in the comic





March's *#101*. "It's very much a horror book as opposed to a superhero book because the Top Cow universe is not really a superhero universe," says Hine, who will be teaming up with his former *Detective Comics* partner Jeremy Haun.

"Superheroes are really modern and to do with technology whereas Top Cow has this almost Lovecraftian universe with all these dark, hidden occult things that have been affecting humanity for hundreds of years."

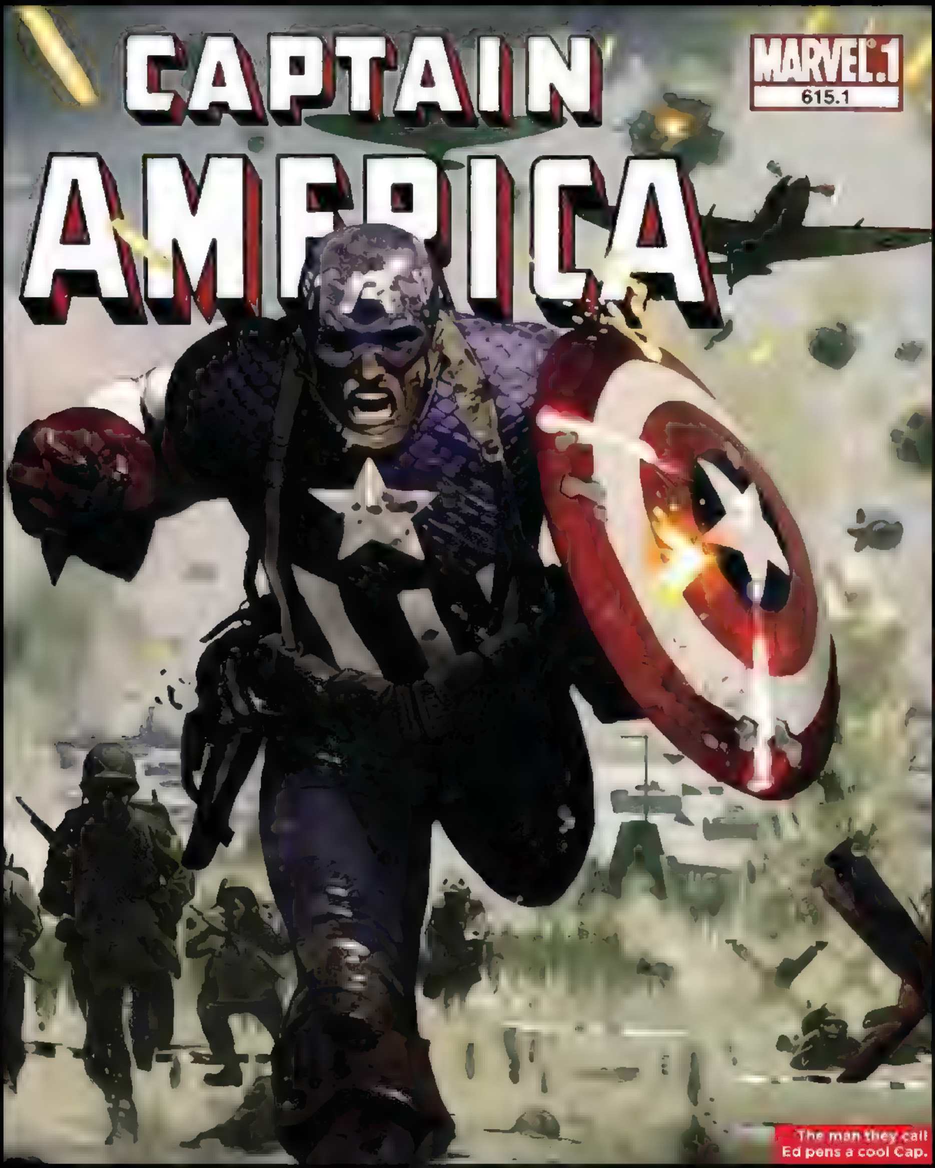
Composed of self-contained stories, *The Bulletproof Coffin: Disinterred*'s six issues can be read in order. "As we've been putting them together, a lot of points of contact have come up between them, so although they do stand alone, there are an awful lot of links in there to the other issues and the first series as well," says Hine. "We've done a lot to mess with our readers' heads again. It will be worth reading and re-reading the books to get all the links."

According to Hine, the first issue is the origin story of policeman-turned-vigilante the Shield of Justice, or at least it appears to be. "He's a plain-clothes detective who has a secret identity – but it could just be a fantasy that becomes reality," he teases.

"The second issue is a collection of three short stories set in a jazz club in the late '50s/early '60s, where instead of poetry nights you get up and tell true horror stories. One is about a surgeon in Victorian times, one is about a woman with a fetishistic fear of body hair and one is a crazy beat story."

Starring the Unforgiving Eye and Coffin Fly, Hine describes #3 as a Kirby-esque fantasy. "In one sense, it's like an early '60s Marvel book but it could all be happening in the head of a 10-year-old kid, who is sitting in his bedroom playing with toys," he laughs. "With #4, I had a lot of ideas for different stories so we decided to basically put them all together into one issue as a series of panels, which will then be cut up and reshuffled as we're interested in non-linear storytelling. #5 will tell the story of the zombie Vietnam veterans the Hateful Dead as a series of '60s bubblegum cards, which Shaky will do as full-page splashes."

Based on an unsuccessful Vertigo pitch about an overweight housebreaker searching for her long lost child, Hine has saved the most challenging storyline for #6. "DC didn't like it but I thought it would be perfect for *Bulletproof Coffin*," he says. "Shaky actually drew it first because it was originally going to be the first issue but it was a bit too different. I thought we better not put people off until the end – if we do it with the last issue it's too late for them to stop reading." **CH**



The man they call Ed pens a cool Cap.

CRIME PAYS

Stephen Jewell tips his fedora back and talks to Ed Brubaker, Mr Captain America and crime comics' current prime architect...

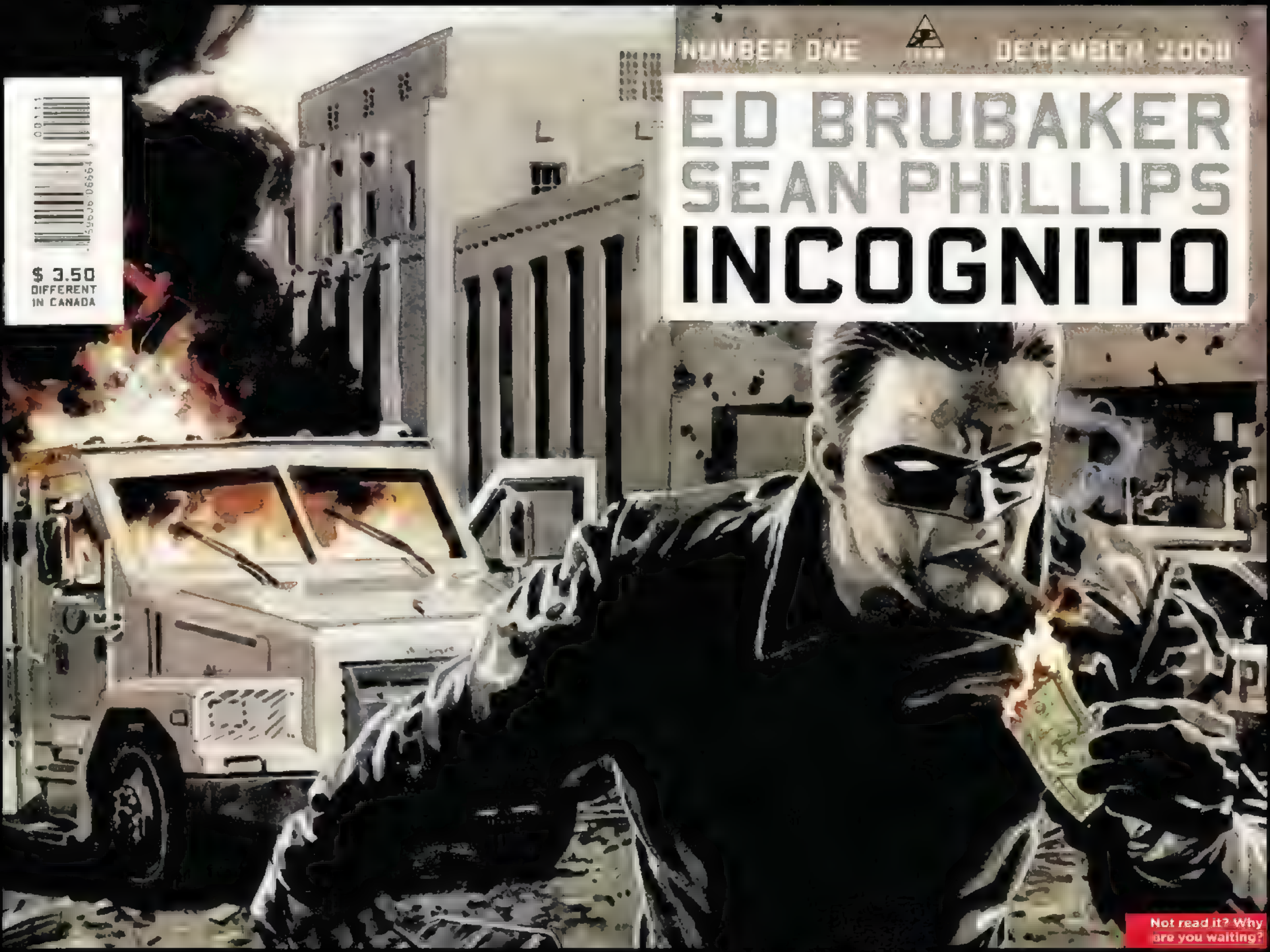
From *Captain America*'s superhero spy thrillers to *Criminal*'s gritty underworld capers, Ed Brubaker is one of those rare comic book authors who is equally adept at turning out impressive work-for-hire scripts as he is at developing his more personal, intimate projects. This year the Seattle-based scribe will continue to spread his wings in both directions as he not only branches off Steve Rogers' erstwhile right-hand man Bucky Barnes, aka the Winter Soldier, into his own monthly Marvel title but also launches new Image series *Fatale* with long-time artistic partner-in-crime Sean Phillips.

"It's a different thing for us," says Brubaker. "Sean and I have this really great collaborative relationship and whenever we do something other than *Criminal*, we try to push ourselves into different genres. Instead of just doing the same kind of thing over and over again, we try to embrace different kinds of ideas."

While the pair's 2008 six-parter *Incognito* put a distinctive spin upon the well-worn tenets of the superhero medium, *Fatale* ventures into more sinister, spooky territory. "Making the comparison to *Incognito*, that was like 'what if the people who did the old pulp detective stories and the people who did Doc Savage and The Shadow had all worked for the same magazine?'," suggests Brubaker. "What if those two styles, the pulp detective and the pulp hero, had been blended together to see what would happen in those worlds? *Fatale* is what you'd get if James M Cain and HP Lovecraft had collaborated on a story."

Brubaker first attempted to pen a horror yarn several years ago. "It's been a real struggle as I've wanted to do something that was a bit macabre for quite a while," he recalls. "Ever since I started *Criminal*, I've been working on an idea for something supernatural but I just couldn't get it to work.

"Part of the reason was that I was trying to write like a different sort of writer – in a way that I'm not comfortable with. But for the past five or six years, a little piece of this bigger idea has been kicking around in my head until suddenly it all fell into place and I knew how to bring my natural voice to it. I'm trying to do something that feels different to what we've done before but at the same time it's obviously by us. It still has a crime/romance/noir vibe to it but it's playing in waters that



Not read it? Why are you waiting?

are much more Alan Moore or Neil Gaiman-esque in some ways, or more like Stephen King or HP Lovecraft."

Just as neither *Criminal* nor *Incognito* refers to a specific individual, the enigmatic, gun-toting Jo – or indeed her seemingly identical grandmother Josephine – is not necessarily this series' titular femme fatale. "She's not the main character, she's just one of them, as it's actually a very sprawling story with a very sprawling cast," explains Brubaker.

"I've always wanted to do a big epic thing and this is what has come out of that. A little part of that was wanting to explore the archetype of the femme fatale. I wanted to do a story where one of the characters was a femme fatale who, as opposed to being just a plot device, was actually a sympathetic main character. If you look back at the history of the femme fatale – once it became a noir kind of thing – you often have to do a lot of reading between the lines to realise that these women are actually characters in their own right."

FROM TIME TO TIME

According to Brubaker, the open-ended series will run for a minimum of 12 issues. "I need at least that long to tell the story," he explains. "After you read the first issue, you'll realise that it hints at a really grand scope of a story. There's so much going on that it took me a while to wrap my head around it. That's partly why the story takes place in multiple time periods. I'm trying to think of something to compare it to and the only thing I can think of is Gothic books like *Wuthering Heights* or big sprawling stories like *100 Years Of Solitude* and *Love In The Time Of Cholera*. I wanted to do something that spanned a certain amount of history and told stories within stories.

"One of my favourite stories of all time is the 'Dwarf's Tale' from *One Thousand And One Nights*. Every five pages or so, somebody else starts telling a story in the middle of another story – a kind of Russian doll idea of storytelling. *Fatale* is the most challenging thing I've ever written in terms of technical ability as far as the plot and structure goes."

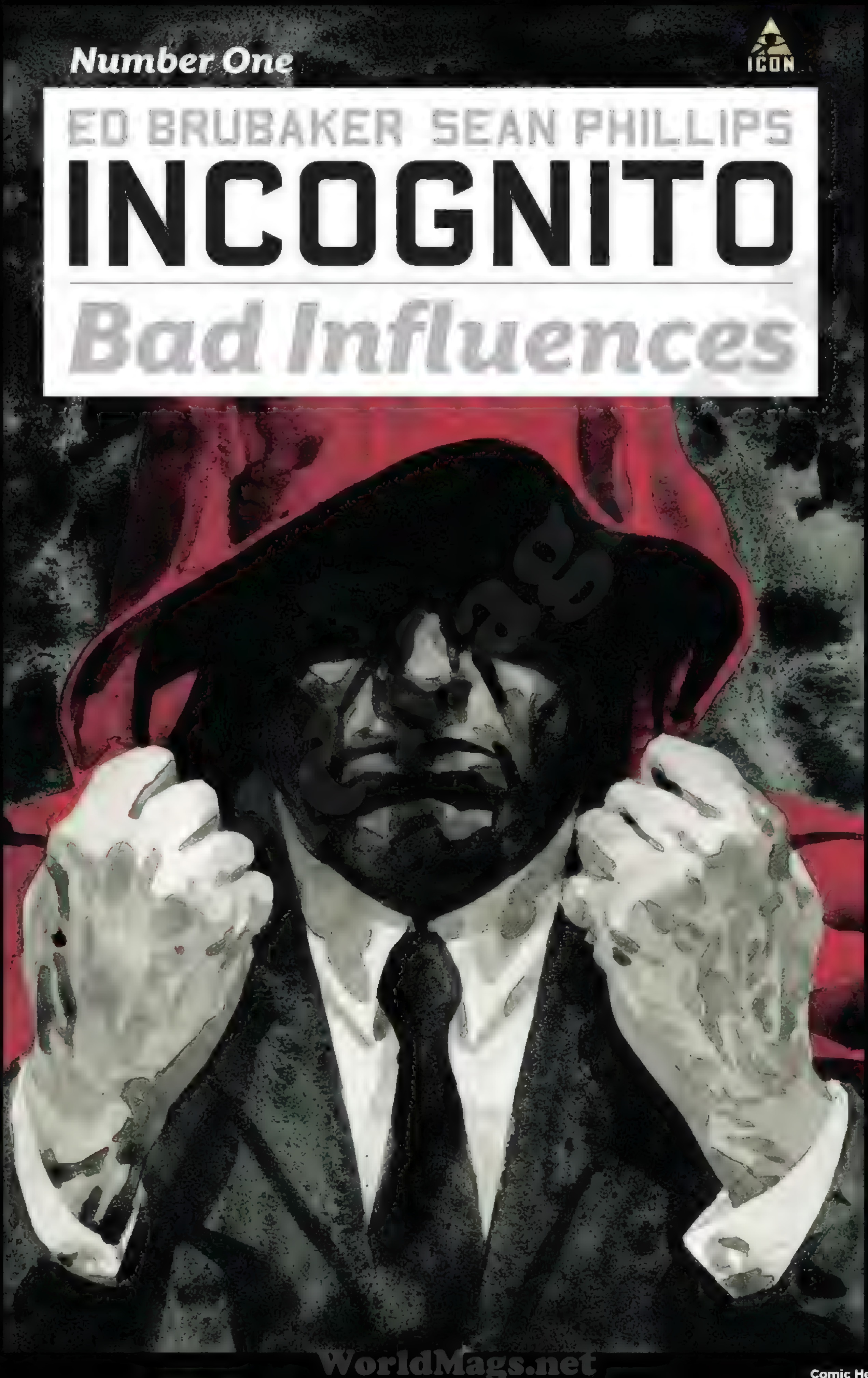
Brubaker initially worked with Phillips on 1999 Vertigo mini *Scene Of The Crime* and 2003 Wildstorm series *Sleeper* before the pair moved to Marvel, which first published *Criminal* through its creator-owned Icon imprint in 2006.

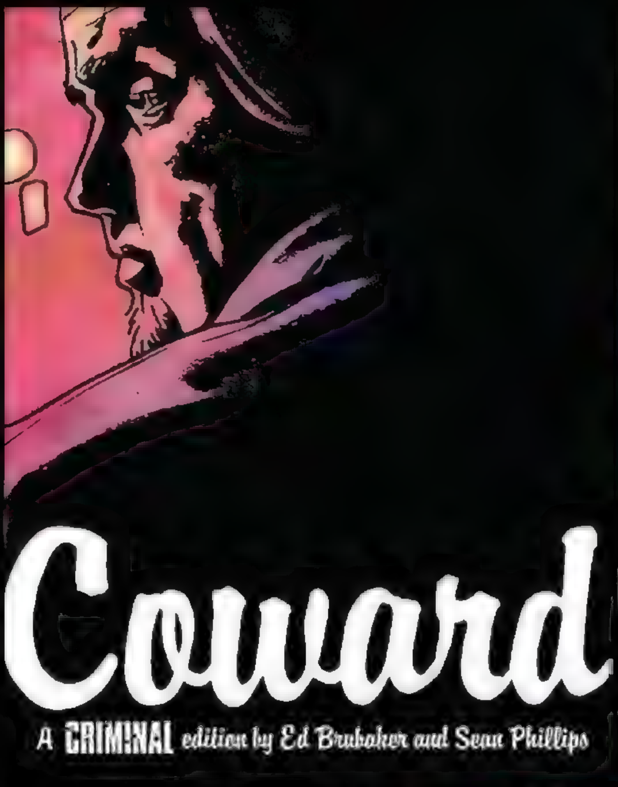
"There's so many good things about working with Sean but if I had to pick out the best, it would be that he produces. I'm very deadline-oriented and having Sean constantly about to catch up, or chomping at the bit for more pages, really keeps me moving through the stories," says Brubaker of the prolific Brit.

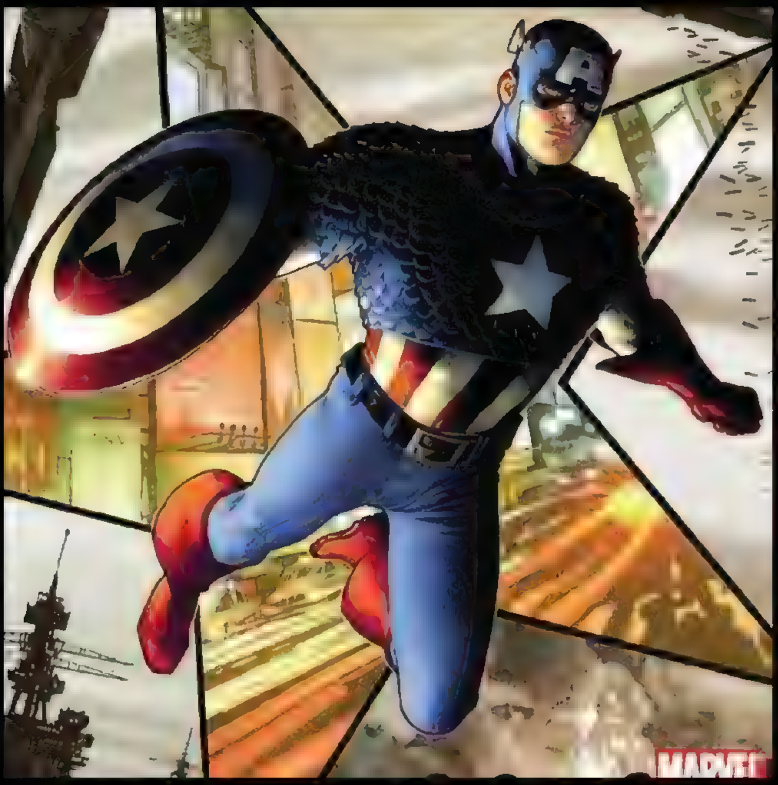
"I started working with him around the time that I started dating my wife and those are the two longest relationships of my life – the two people I'm in regular contact with. I really love the way he draws my stories and it's easier to write for him because he always knows what I'm asking for. He has an amazing sense of story structure and storytelling and he does his own lettering, as he's as much of a control freak as I am. I love that we have these books where we can tell all sorts of different stories."

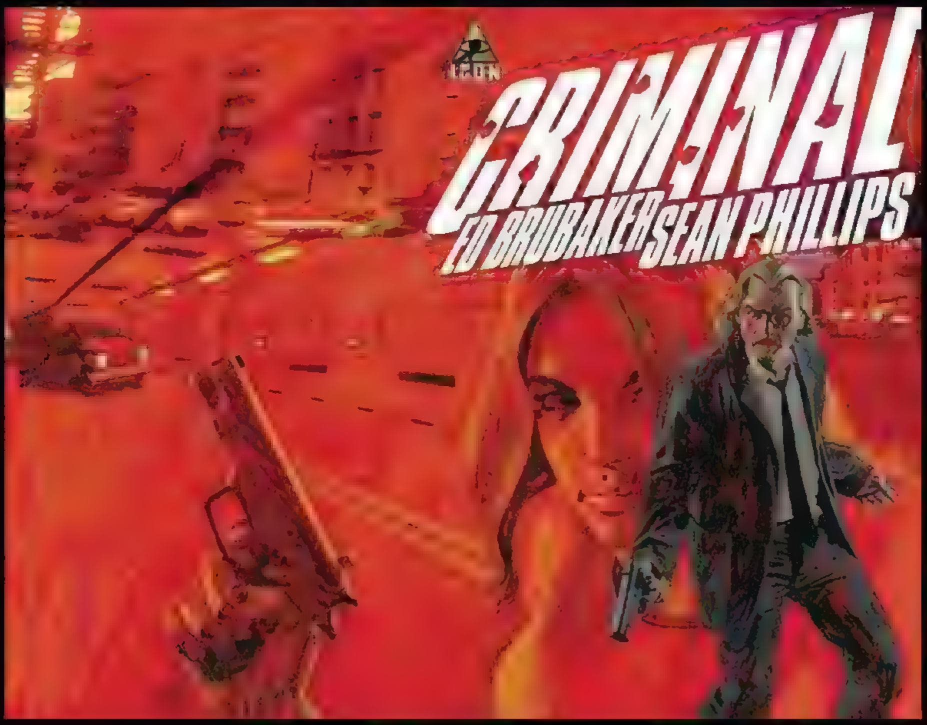
Sleeper's two series are utterly brilliant.

Brubaker's connection with Marvel's Sentinel of Liberty has lasted almost as long: he first assumed the writing reins on Captain America in late 2004. But while he admits that "he's not going to do it forever" and doesn't intend to break the late Mark Gruenwald's


Number One
ICON
ED BRUBAKER SEAN PHILLIPS
INCOGNITO
Bad Influences


Coward
A CRIMINAL edition by Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips





decade-long mid 80s/early 90s run, Brubaker is increasing his commitments to the star-spangled Avenger's corner of the Marvel Universe, adding the adventures of Steve Rogers' erstwhile sidekick Bucky Barnes in this month's new *Winter Soldier* monthly alongside the flagship *Captain America* title and co-writing chores on the historical *Captain America And Bucky*.

"I try to ensure that each book has its own voice," he says. "*Captain America* and *Winter Soldier* are companion titles but they're completely different in tone."

Describing it as a cross between James Bond and the Tom Clancy-inspired video game *Splinter Cell*, *Winter Soldier* features the renegade Bucky and his girlfriend the Black Widow hiding out in the shadows after his apparent demise in *Fear Itself*.

"There's all sorts of over-the-top craziness, like gorillas with jetpacks and Doctor Doom, because when you're dealing with espionage and secret missions in the Marvel Universe, you're dealing with Wakanda, Latveria and Madripoor," he notes.

"It's the kind of book that we haven't seen at Marvel for a long time – I'm trying to do what Steranko did back in the '60s with *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD*, which didn't really fit in with the other Marvel books at the time as it had its own villains and its own feel. I want to do a book like that but grounded in what's happened at Marvel since then."

DREAM WEAVERS

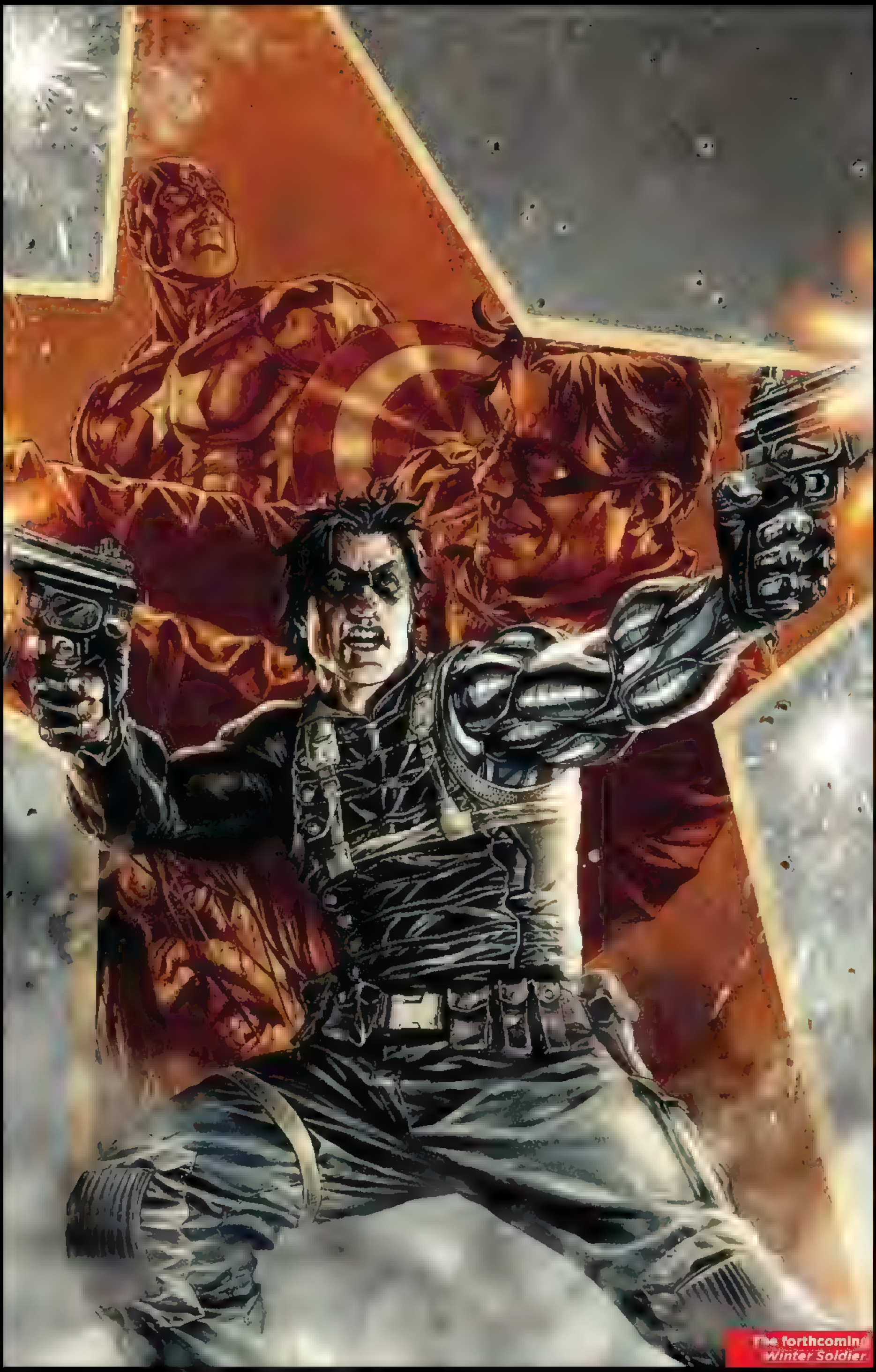
In contrast, *Captain America* itself boasts more traditionally bombastic action. "Since we relaunched the book last summer to coincide with the movie coming out, it's trodden the line between high superhero stuff and espionage," says Brubaker. "The first storyline, which I did with Steve McNiven, dealt with the realm of dreams because *Captain America* is so much about the American Dream. Alan Davis is drawing the second arc and it's much more of a mix of that Skull and Crossbones cloak and dagger sort of thing, with a classic Cap adventure from the '70s and '80s, because I've got Alan Davis and so you want him to draw people in costumes running around punching each other with lots of craziness."

Co-written first with Marc Andreyko and latterly James Asmus, *Captain America And Bucky* showcases out-of-continuity tales. "It's like a sister book that needs to find stories to tell between the raindrops of what we're doing on *Cap*," says Brubaker. "There's always room for stories like that if people like them and if you do them in a way that makes them feel like they actually matter. I hate how when there's so many Marvel and DC comics coming out, people look at them and say 'does this matter?' as if that's more important than 'is this good?'."

While *Criminal* is on hold following the conclusion of sixth volume *The Last Of The Innocent* last year, Brubaker is currently adapting first storyline *Coward* into a feature film for *30 Days Of Night* director Dave Slade. "He is one of the biggest *Criminal* fans in the world and has probably bought more copies of the hardbacks to give away to people than anybody I know," laughs Brubaker.

"We've been talking about doing this for a couple of years now and trying to figure out a way to do this book as a movie. But it's not like a huge departure; it's just that things that are internal have to become visual. It's like a different language."

Brubaker initially considered approaching *Inception*/*Dark Knight Rises* helmer Christopher Nolan before inadvertently discovering Slade's interest. "I was in LA about two years ago, going to this event that Christopher Nolan was going to be at so I wanted to get the *Criminal* hardback to him as a fan," he recalls. "So I called Meltdown



The forthcoming *Winter Soldier*

A CRIMINAL
Sean Phillips
The Last Of The Innocent

ED BRUBAKER SEAN PHILLIPS
FATALE
Number One

> **“The last arc of *Criminal* was so much about myself it was almost painful to look at”**

Comics but they were all out of *Criminal* books as Dave Slade had been in that afternoon and bought them all. I called my manager and said that we should see what the deal is because he'd just come off the biggest movie of the year [*The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*]. I also liked *Hard Candy* and his visual aesthetic is right up there with early Ridley Scott. I worked with him for a week and it was clear that he was exactly the right guy. He sees the story in his head and it was really just a case of what do we cut out, or change, or expand.”

While *Criminal*'s hardboiled scenarios should lend themselves well to the cinema, Brubaker insists that his inspirations are not essentially filmic. “I don't know what has or hasn't influenced it,” he admits.

“I've never sat down and said ‘I'm going to do a book that's influenced by this or that’. It all comes from me and my history and, if anything, I'm writing about myself in various ways whenever I sit down to write *Criminal*, especially the last arc, which was so much about myself that it was almost painful to look at.

“But I read so much of that stuff and I grew up watching noir films so it's all just part of my DNA at this point. If you look at the arcs, ‘Lawless’ is obviously a revenge story like *Get Carter*, *Sitting Target* or any number of films. Once you have the genre and the thrust of your story, everything that comes into it is really just the way I write.”

Once *Fatale* reaches its eventual conclusion, Brubaker and Phillips will return to *Criminal*'s shady streets. “My feeling is that we will keep alternating it with different projects as it keeps *Criminal* fresh when you give it a rest and then come back to it later,” he says.

“It helps me figure out what's going on in that world because we've now got six trade paperbacks out there and the characters and the world have gotten so big that when I'm working on other things, ideas for *Criminal* stories start rattling around in my head.

“I have a lot of different stuff I want to do, like some sci-fi stuff, and as long as Sean keeps motoring through whatever scripts I give him, I'll keep doing whatever I can… or whatever I can get away with.”

JUDGE JAMES'S COMICS COURTROOM

CRIMINALLY CRAPPY COMICS
BLOOF
My Brother's A Chimp!

Todd McFarlane's *Spider-Man* – multimillion-selling work of genius, or all scribble and no script? **Judge James Lovegrove** presides...

PROSECUTION: I have a question. When is a comic that sold in vast quantities, illustrated by a fan-favourite artist, garlanded with industry awards, a failure?

DEFENCE: Surely the question is self-negating. A comic cannot be a failure if it fulfils those criteria. M'lud, this case should be thrown out of court before it even begins.

PROSECUTION: The question is intended to be ironic, as well my learned friend knows. And the answer is: when it's Todd McFarlane's *Spider-Man*. In 1990 Mr McFarlane had just enjoyed a very successful run on *Amazing Spider-Man* with writer David Michelinie.

DEFENCE: Not only that but McFarlane's style, full of dynamism and drama, was held in high esteem and considered the epitome of good comics artwork at the time. He depicted Spider-Man in unusual, insectile poses and made his webbing eye-catchingly tangled and elaborate. Spidey, to use the colloquial nickname, hadn't looked so striking, so angularly creepy, since the Ditko era. Really, the prosecution is doing my job for me here. I may as well sit back and watch him mount my defence even as he supposedly attacks.

PROSECUTION: However, McFarlane expressed a desire to leave *Amazing* and write his own scripts, and in order to entice him to stay on at Marvel, editor Jim Salicrup offered him a brand new Spider title to both draw and write. It did not seem to worry Salicrup that McFarlane was entirely an unknown quantity in that regard.

DEFENCE: John Byrne had no proven track record when he took over *Fantastic Four* in 1981. Frank Miller on *Daredevil*? George Pérez on *Wonder Woman*? Comics artists are, by their very nature, storytellers. Putting prose into captions isn't necessarily beyond them, and it's insulting to suggest that it is.

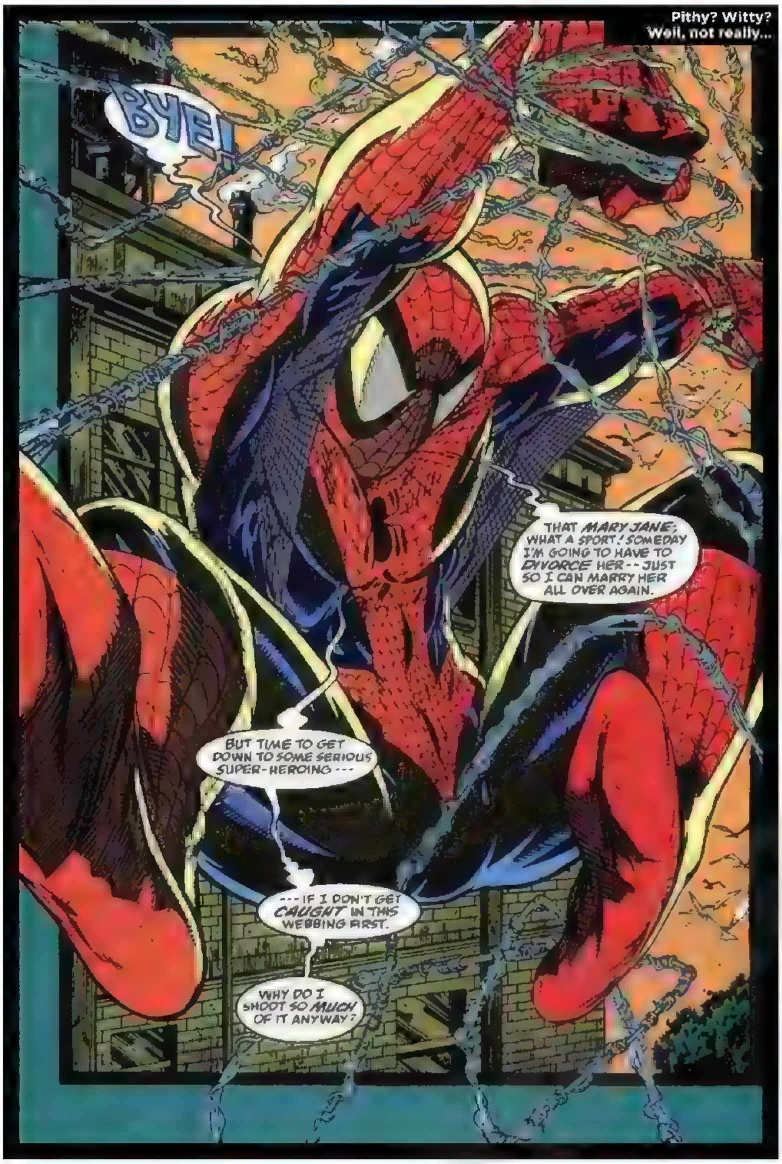
PROSECUTION: Except in McFarlane's case. His literary efforts on *Spider-Man* are dismal. Take the first five-issue arc, 'Torment' – and what an apt name that is, as far as the reader is concerned. Little happens, collectively or individually. Spidey fights and Mary Jane goes out clubbing. Oh, and they whinge. Both of them. A lot.

DEFENCE: It's called 'narrative decompression', is it not? It's all the rage these days. You could summarise the content of a single Mark Millar comic on the back of a postage stamp, and still have room to talk about the latest Warren Ellis. McFarlane was simply ahead of the curve.

PROSECUTION: The next five-parter, 'Perceptions', is even worse. Super-monster the Wendigo is accused of eating children in some backwoods region of British Columbia. Spider-Man is caught up in it, as is Wolverine. Sound interesting, no? Yet the plotting is hopelessly convoluted, the characterisation mishandled, and the dénouement like something out of *Scooby-Doo*.

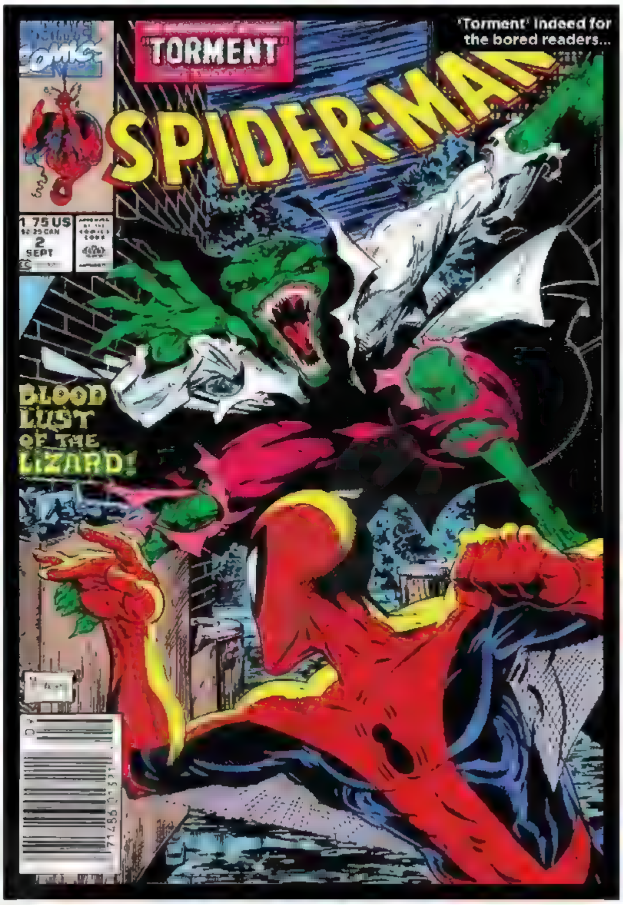
DEFENCE: Throughout the 14 issues, McFarlane and Salicrup's comments in the letters pages made it clear they were aware of McFarlane's deficiencies as a writer and begged readers' indulgence while offering repeated assurances that he was improving. Let us at least give them credit for frankness.

PROSECUTION: But his writing isn't just 'deficient', it's diabolical. Take this specimen



Pithy? Witty? Well, not really...

BYE!
THAT MARY JANE; WHAT A SPORT! SOMEDAY I'M GOING TO HAVE TO DIVORCE HER -- JUST SO I CAN MARRY HER ALL OVER AGAIN.
BUT TIME TO GET DOWN TO SOME SERIOUS SUPER-HEROING ---
--- IF I DON'T GET CAUGHT IN THIS WEBBING FIRST.
WHY DO I SHOOT SO MUCH OF IT ANYWAY?



'Torment' indeed for the bored readers...

TORMENT
SPIDER-MAN
1.75 US
2
SEPT
BLOOD LUST OF THE LIZARD!

> **“ Sales were artificially boosted by multiple variant covers and ‘poly-bagged’ editions ”**

from issue 6. Guest star the Ghost Rider says, and I quote, “Degrading children in vile pornographic movies can have no logical explanation”. While one cannot gainsay the sentiment, the expression is banal and cack-handed in the extreme.

DEFENCE: By contrast, how about this from the subsequent issue? Spider-Man says, “We save the innocent at any cost. Not cost an innocent during a save”. Rather pithy and witty, don't you think? And it represents the syntactical structure known, I believe, as chiasmus, in which key words are reversed to create rhetorical symmetry. Hardly the handiwork of an amateur writer, I'd suggest.

PROSECUTION: Then there is the recurrent theme of abused and maimed children, which is tasteless at best and neither challenging nor thought-provoking. Not to mention the overall tone of grime, viciousness and religious angst that's utterly inappropriate to a light-hearted character.

DEFENCE: Grime, viciousness and religious angst? Then one could call the series a dry run for McFarlane's hugely popular *Spawn*.

PROSECUTION: One could also hold the series directly accountable for the whole pernicious 1990's Image ethos of art being favoured at the expense of plot – and not terribly good art either. To this day, McFarlane exhibits a lamentable lack of knowledge of basic anatomy and composition. He disguises his inadequacies under an excess of lines or else heavy, obscuring shadow.

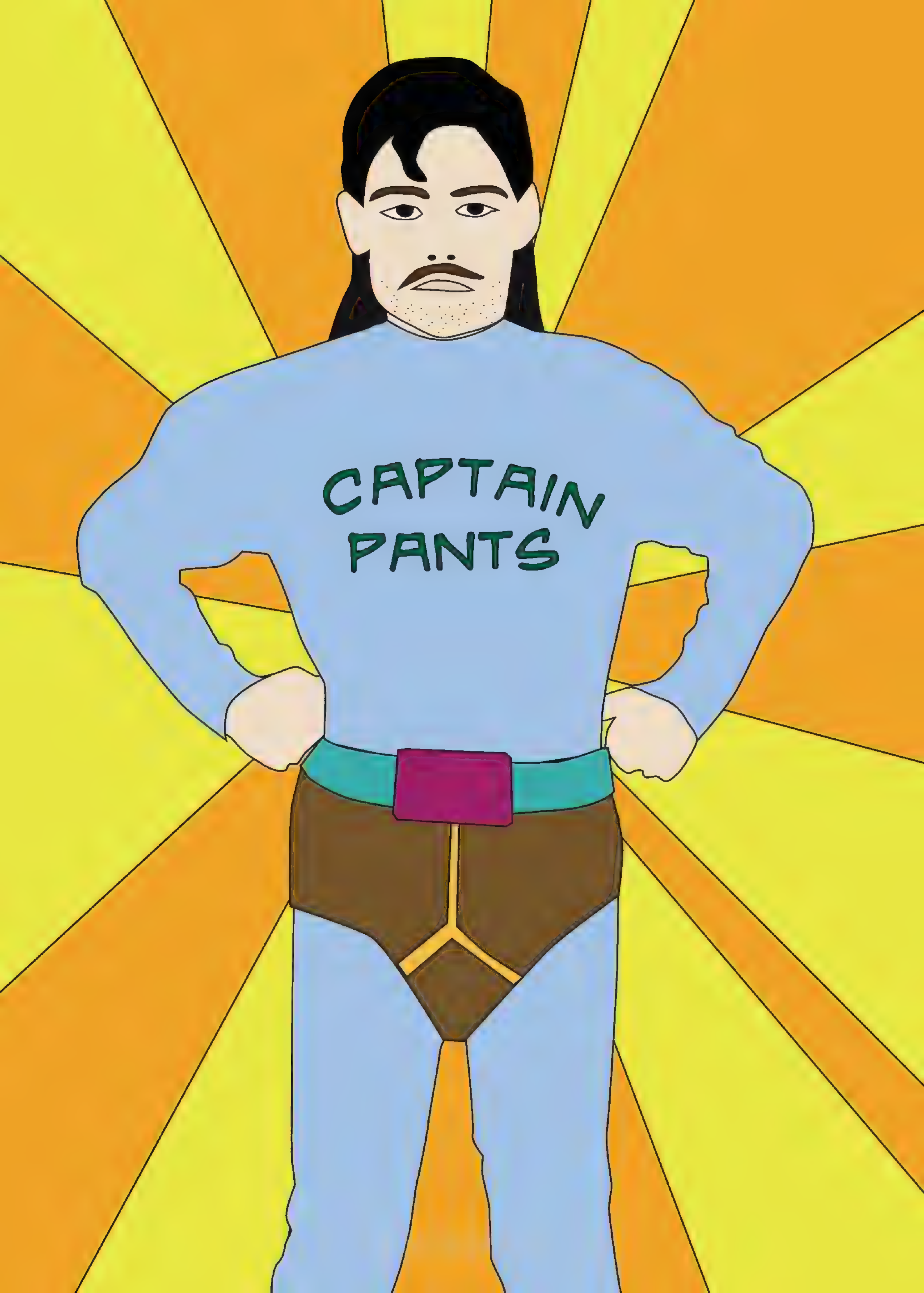
DEFENCE: But I refer you again to the sales figures. The first issue alone shifted something like 2.5 million copies. As a crowd-pleaser, McFarlane's *Spider-Man* ranks among the finest comics ever produced.

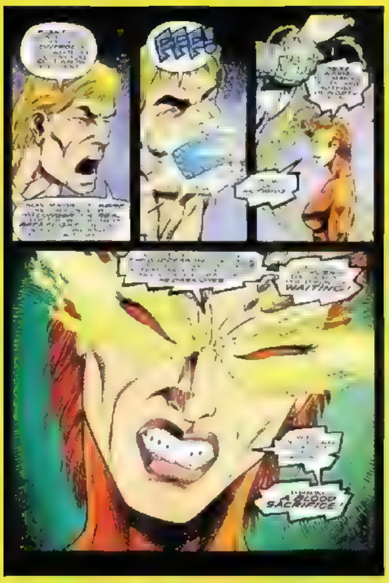
PROSECUTION: Sales were artificially boosted by multiple variant covers and ‘poly-bagged’ editions, all designed to entice unwary collectors and would-be speculators into buying extra copies. *Spider-Man* stands as a triumph of publisher greed and ‘hot creator’ branding over the virtues of decent storytelling and simple craftsmanship.

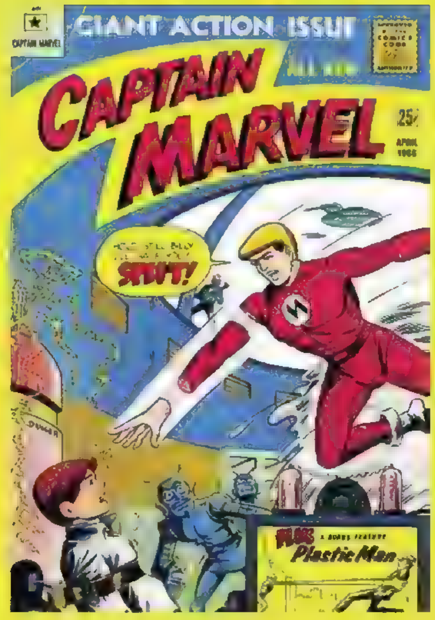
DEFENCE: Perhaps my learned friend wishes his income was on a par with that of Mr McFarlane, who has found the world of comics publishing to be extremely lucrative.

PROSECUTION: As a lawyer, I refuse to dignify that comment with a reply. CH

IN THE DOCK NEXT TIME:
The Mighty Crusaders, *a 1960's team book written by Superman co-creator Jerry Siegel – so it has to be good, right?*


CAPTAIN
PANTS





Left: Manikin gets shut up and Captain Marvel demonstrates his own rubbishness

HUMILIATING HEROES

Some say there's no such thing as a bad character; we tend to disagree. **Matt Bielby** compiles his crumbiest comics crew…

From creepy Triathlon to ugly Maggott, smug Gambit to tiresome Deadpool, useless Aquaman to boring Blue Beetle, many of the biggest names in the medium have plenty who hate them, oft with good reason. Believe us, however, when we say there are *worse* than these guys gadding about, as the following categories of crap should reveal…

GOOFY GANGBUSTERS

It's easy to mock the early days of American comics, those boom years when any dumb idea was worth a try and no-one quite knew what it was the audience was responding to anyway. So we shall, with these five dopey do-gooders:

MADAME FATAL She was the '40's little old lady with the pet parrot Hamlet, and the strength and speed of a contemporary athlete – largely because that's what she secretly was, a burly widower who dressed as a doddering dear to fight crime.

CAPTAIN MARVEL No, not that one (or that other one), but the short-lived 1966 android hero from the shameless MF Enterprises who yelled 'Split!' to divide his body (arms, legs, head, even fingers) into independent flying chunks, like some camp human Mecha.

THE RED BEE Highly flamboyant, in his puffy sleeves and red-and-yellow hooped tights, this '40's flash-in-the-pan had the least intimidating secret weapon ever: a trained bumble bee called Michael that lived in his belt buckle, and flew out to sting evil-doers.

TURGID TOUGH GUYS

The '80s and '90s had a lot to answer for, not least the rash of ultra-violent killer heroes who came in the wake of Punisher and Wolverine. Here are the worst of a sorry bunch:

WILD DOG Getting it wrong, as usual, DC dressed this vigilante like an unappealing cross between some backwoods survivalist and Jason from *Friday The 13th*: ice hockey mask, Army surplus camo and the sort of shirt you might buy from an Atlanta branch of JD Sports.

GUNFIRE Len Wein created Wolverine and Swamp Thing, plus this no mark – he dressed in body armour and could turn anything he held into a gun, or perhaps a bomb. (His best moment came in *Hitman One Million*, when a future version turns his own arse-cheeks into a grenade.)

SHADOWHAWK Jim Valentino's contribution to early Image Comics was an HIV-positive vigilante (he would later die of AIDS) with a brutal, spine-breaking modus operandi – it's hard to think of a more relentlessly violent, or tasteless, superhero concept.

PATHETIC POWERS

Many heroes have so-so powers or make bad costume choices (Razorback's magnificent pig-helmet isn't easily forgotten), but few powers are quite as queasy as these:

MANIKIN This minor Alpha Flighter could call on three of his genetic relatives from the history of human evolution – Proto (a largely useless blob); Ape-Man (strong but thick); and Highbrow (a teleporting future-type loaded with kit). No prizes for guessing who he summoned most often.

DOC SAMSON Nothing too wrong with being a gamma-powered boffin with Hulk-strength, but his original weakness, that his power relies on the length of his hair, is surely taking a Biblical reference too far.

STARFOX Ah, Eros of Titan, such a cheeky chappy with his unitard, winning smile – and ability to

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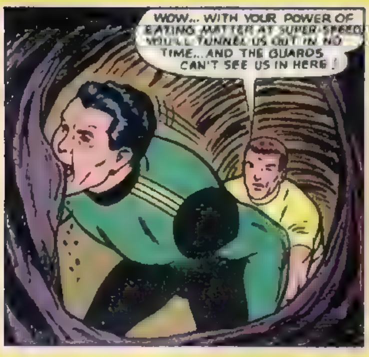
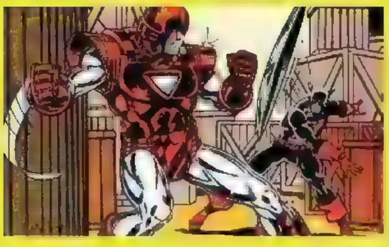

WOW... WITH YOUR POWER OF EATING MATTER AT SUPER-SPEED, YOU'LL TUNNEL US OUT IN NO TIME... AND THE GUARDS CAN'T SEE US IN HERE!



July No.1
10¢
HIT
COMICS
THE RED BEE
NEON
THE STRANGE TWINS

MARVEL LIMITED SERIES
2 of 8
JENKINS
ROMITA Jr.
MORALES
SENTRY
RATED T+
DIRECT EDITION
$2.99 US $4.25 CAN

manipulate the pleasure centres of the human brain. Essentially, it's the power of date rape.

TERRIBLE TRENDS

Occasionally a hero will be created specifically to cash in on a pop culture trend. It can go well (respect to Shang-Chi, Master of Kung Fu), or it can go badly, as here:

VIBE Comics never coped with disco very well, but this breakdancing, lycra-clad '80s Hispanic abomination – imagine Erik Estrada auditioning for Hot Gossip combined the worst aspects of Menudo and Olivia's Xanadu with random earthquake powers. Amazingly, for a couple of years he was a stalwart of the Justice League.

NIGHT THRASHER You can giggle at the name, or the look – imagine a full armoured riot cop on (terrible idea for any superhero, this) a skateboard – but the worst thing about this New Warriors mainstay is how horribly plausible he is: painfully close to one of those 'real life superheroes' you get patrolling car parks in Yeovil.

ULYSSES ARCHER Another '80s classic, this being Marvel's take on high adventure trucking, as in *Convoy* or *BJ And The Bear*. Big rig driver US had a steel plate in his skull that let him receive CB broadcasts, fight bad guys in shark-shaped zeppelins, and meet "Breaker breaker good buddy" chatting aliens.

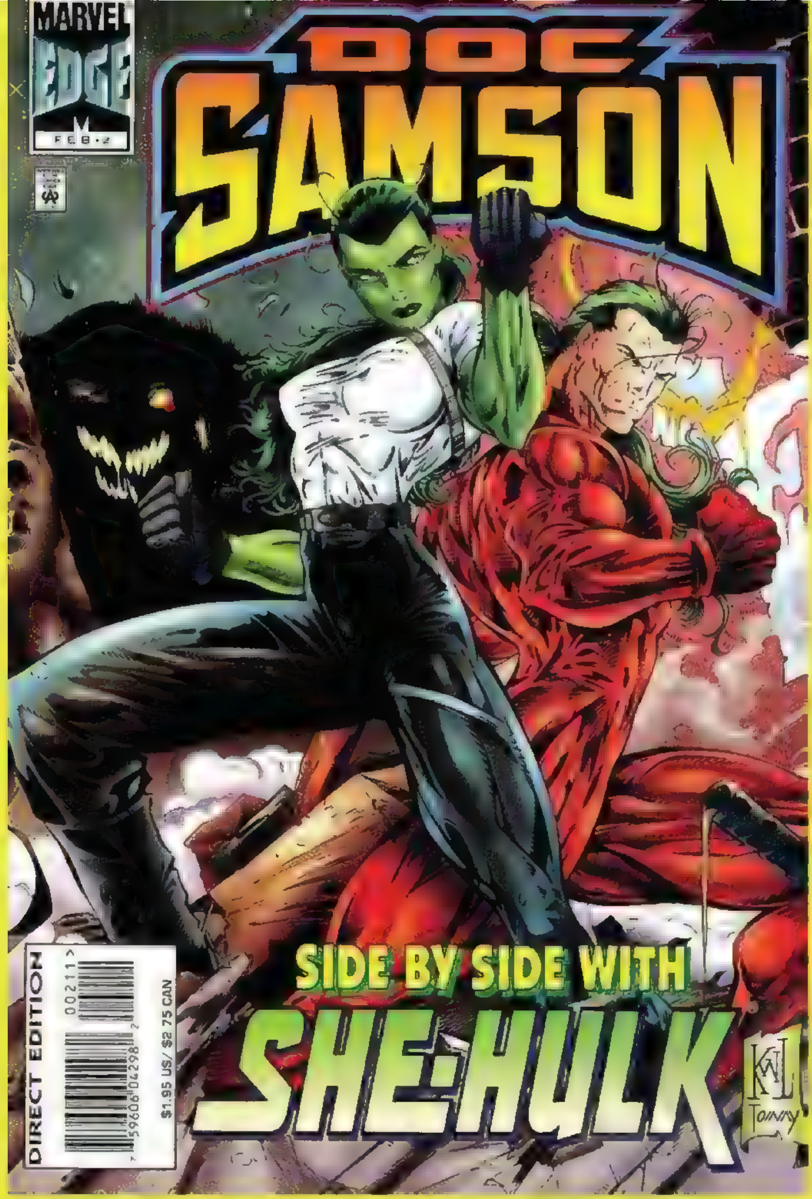
> **“Painfully close to one of those 'real-life superheroes' you get patrolling car parks in Yeovil”**

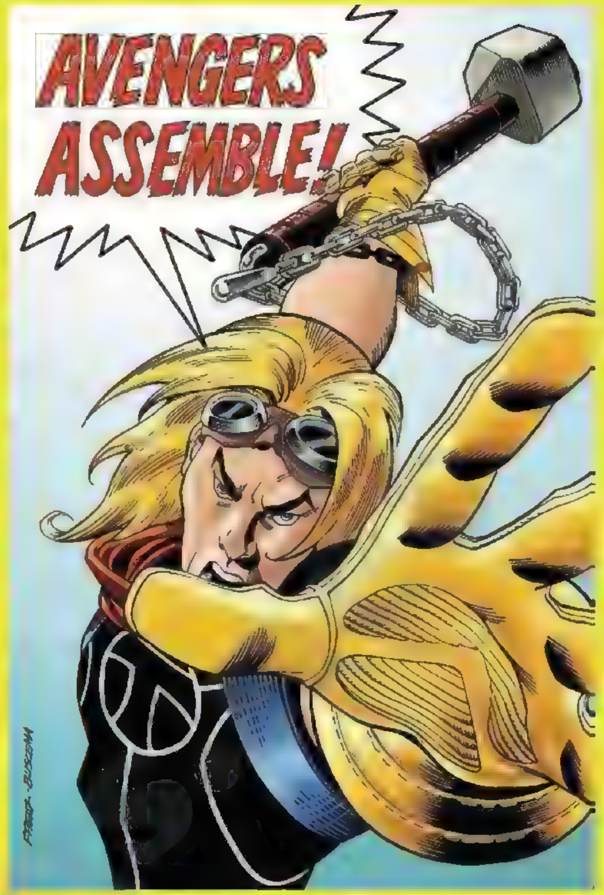
Top left: Matter-Eater Lad demonstrates in one easy panel why he's got such a big gay following.

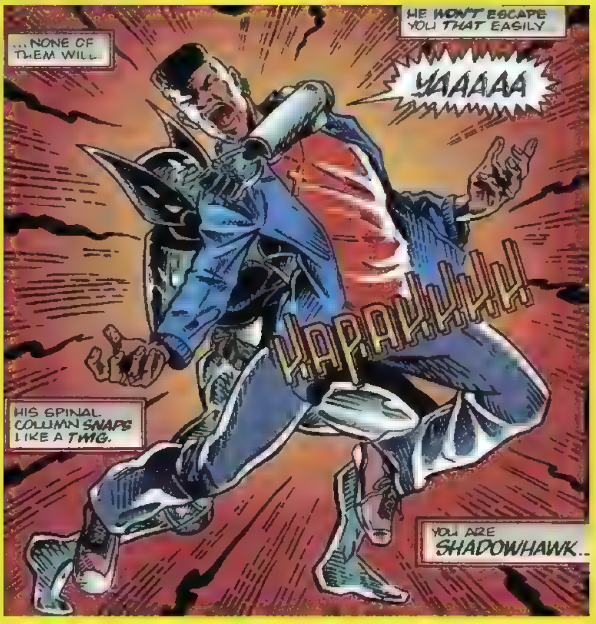
CRUMMY COPYCATS

For reasons of copyright or creative bankruptcy, the history of comics is full of horrible clones of successful stars – distaff versions, kid copies, rubbish replacements and the like. We love She-Hulk and her ilk, but not these guys:

US AGENT The idea of an unpredictable replacement Captain America – one who embodies all the right-wing nutjob fears we may have of someone who dresses in the flag is a good one, but the problem with John Walker is one of inconsistent characterisation, flip-flopping


MARVEL EDGE
FEB 2
DOC SAMSON
SIDE BY SIDE WITH
SHE-HULK
DIRECT EDITION
$1.95 US/ $2.75 CAN


AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!


...NONE OF THEM WILL
HE WON'T ESCAPE YOU THAT EASILY
YAAAAA
YAAAHHHHH
HIS SPINAL COLUMN SNAPS LIKE A TWIG.
YOU ARE SHADOWHAWK...

Top right: Thunderstrike tries to court the younger crowd, but can't replicate Thor's holy coo

“In many stories Stone Boy just stands around doing nothing”

between ‘heart of gold’, ‘total psycho’ and (the default setting) ‘arsehole’.

THUNDERSTRIKE There was at least an idea behind Cap's replacement, but Thunderstrike – an architect with Thor's powers, a blonde mullet-with-ponytail, and a sleeveless leather jacket – is simply tedious, a nothing character seemingly designed to make you appreciate the genius of Beta Ray Bill.

THE SENTRY Marvel's recent(ish) Superman analogue began interestingly enough (all that why-does-nobody-remember-me? stuff) but was simply too powerful to operate easily in the Marvel U, and so had to be sidelined in increasingly baroque ways to prevent every story finishing on page three.

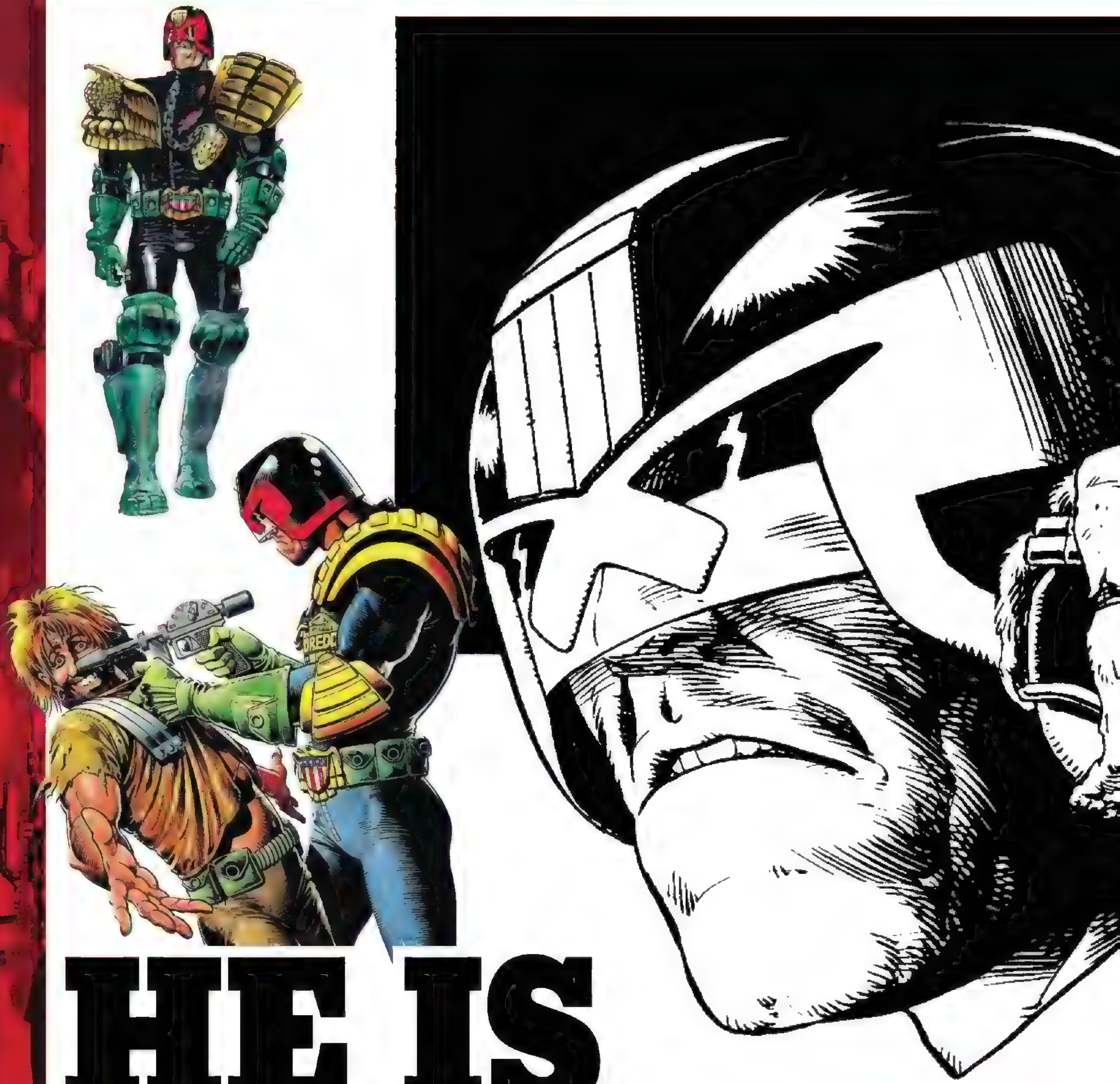
LEGION OF LOSERS

No list of ridiculous heroes would be complete without this lot, a massive far-future army with new characters, each defined by their unique power, created every issue. Amongst our favourites, from a long long list, are these guys:

STONE BOY A founder member of the Legion of Substitute Heroes (basically, the rejects), this guy can freeze himself into an unmoving stone statue – in many stories he just stands around doing nothing.

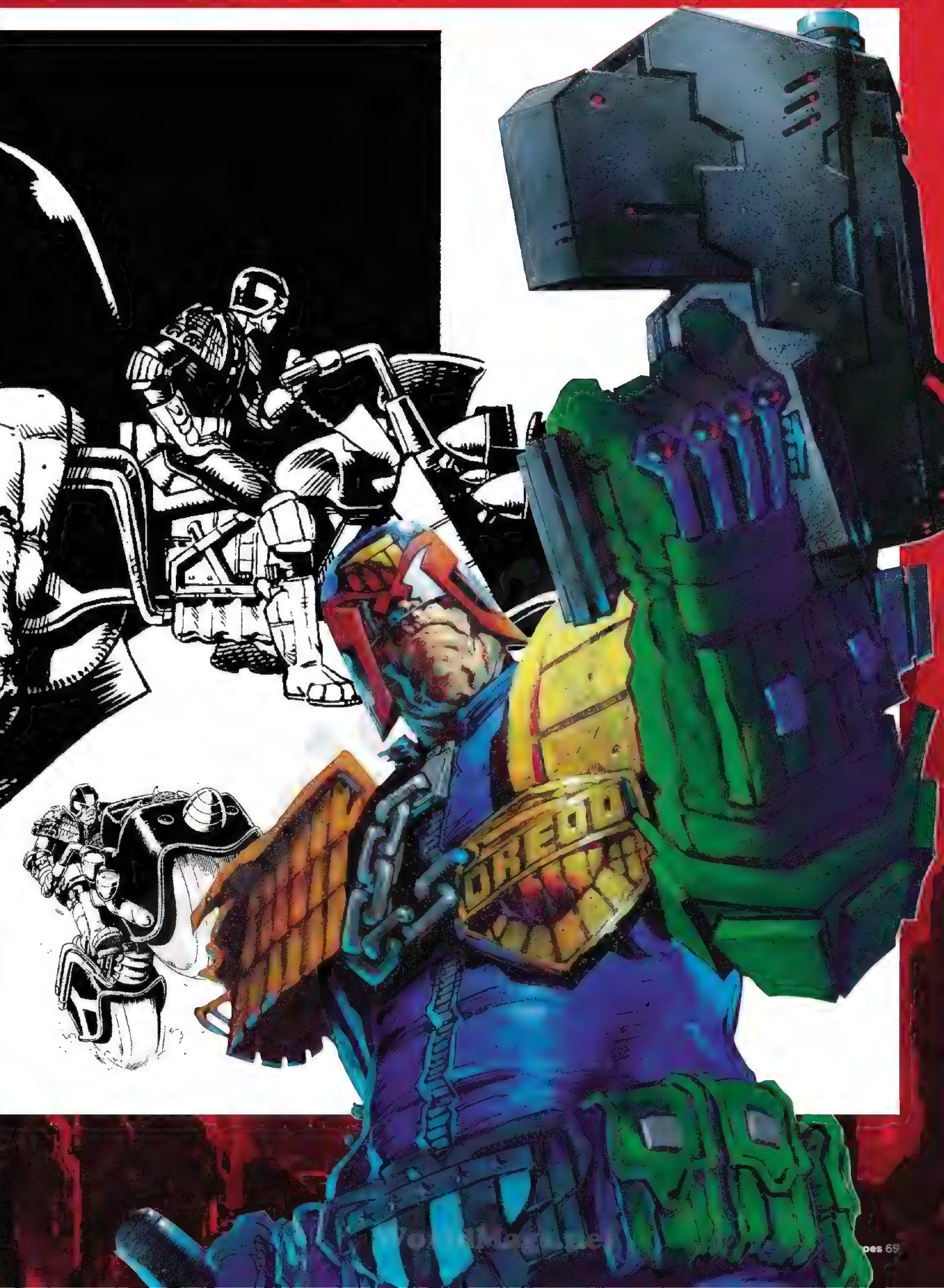
MATTER-EATER LAD One of the genuine Legion, with the power to chomp through anything – useful enough, since he can bite the bars from a cage. The problem, of course, is how ridiculously stupid he looks doing it – we can't think of another hero who's taken part in quite so many unintentionally homoerotic scenes.

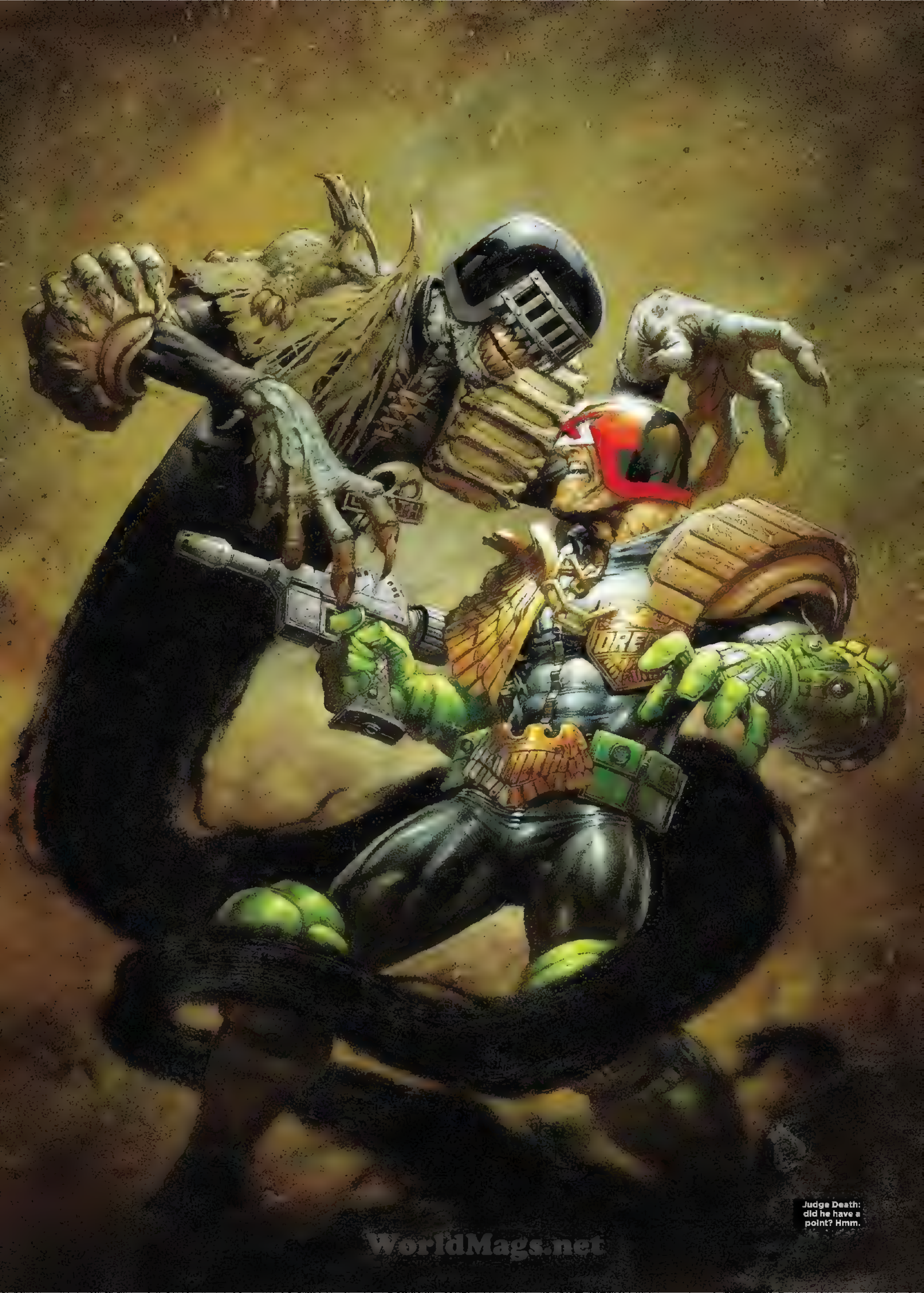
ARM-FALL-OFF BOY Famously weird, this cult favourite from *Secret Origins* #46 – and a character intended to be ridiculous, of course – could remove one arm from his body and use it as a club. It's a good enough joke and he's returned a number of times since, the ‘Plorp’ noises he makes each time he pulls free a limb being a particularly touching detail. CH



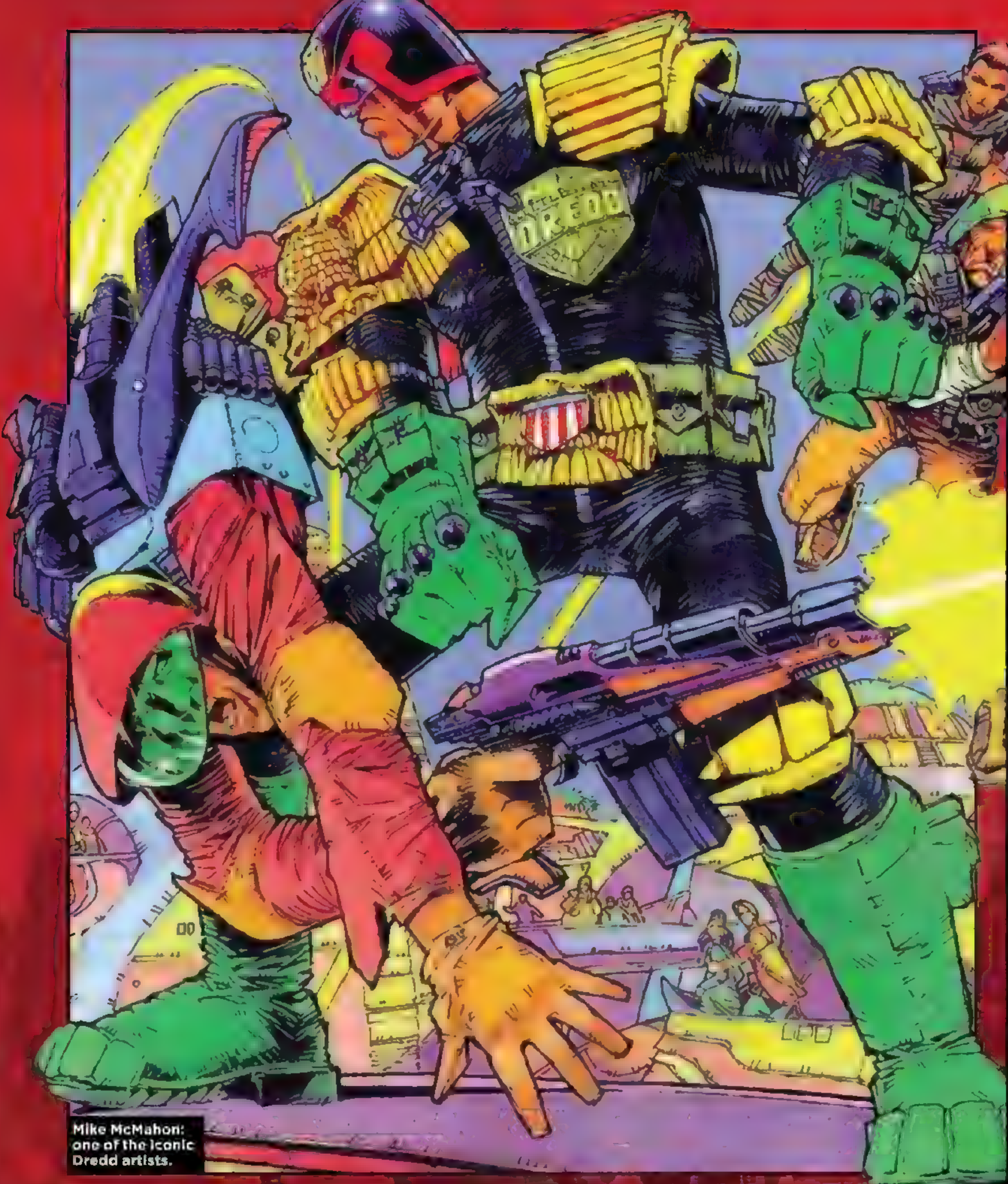
HE IS THE LAW

Michael Molcher celebrates an icon of British comics, and the hardest lawman ever created. His name's Dredd; Joe Dredd.


DREDD



Judge Death: did he have a point? Hmm.



Mike McMahon: one of the iconic Dredd artists.

He is the ultimate anti-hero; a hardline cop who keeps the citizens of his city firmly under his Orwellian boot. Judge Joseph Dredd is the terrifying face of true fascist policing. Judge, jury and executioner in one single being, he imposes draconian laws on a dystopian mass of 400 million people that sprawls along the Eastern coast of America. Everything about him rejects sympathy and compassion – a parentless clone personally responsible for the deaths of more than three billion people, he crushes dissent, rejects democracy and spurns human frailties.

So why does he, an American bully-boy fascist, remain the most popular icon in British comics, known the world over and the subject of a forthcoming second Hollywood movie?

Considering he's just had his 35th birthday, Joe's not in too bad shape; though of course he's now pushing 70, thanks to the fact he ages in real-time. Sharing the DNA of the legendary 'Father of Justice' Judge Fargo with his twin brother, the later corrupted Rico, Joe was bred and shaped to administer instant justice on the streets of the vast crime-ridden megalopolis of Mega-City One. His helmet is famously never to be removed (let's gloss over the 1995 *Judge Dredd* movie for a moment, shall we?), his gun spits six deadly types of ammunition, and rather than getting a night's rest he spends 10 minutes in an accelerated-sleep device. He truly is a law machine.

Scottish writer John Wagner was already a veteran of British comics when Pat Mills asked him to develop a new strip for the sci-fi title he was creating for IPC Magazines. 'Judge Dread', a pitiless historical executioner, had been an idea Mills had toyed with and then rejected, but Wagner took the name, changed the spelling and added a dash of inspiration from 'One-Eyed Jack' (his ultra-violent cop story for the now defunct *Valiant* comic) and *Dirty Harry*.

FACELESS FASCIST

It was down to Spanish artist Carlos Ezquerra to fashion this future cop and his design for a faceless automaton of the law was an instant classic. Heavily influenced by the then popular Punk movement, as well as Spain's all-too-real fascist government, Dredd was as much a physical symbol of the system as the eagle on his shoulder.

Although famously described by Wagner as looking like 'a Spanish pirate', the genius of the costume is that it dehumanises Dredd, while at the same time turning him into an

Writers on Dredd

Other than John Wagner, precious few writers have been able to successfully capture the complex mix of cynicism, satire and all-out action that marks out the greatest Dredd stories. In the past few years, a new cadre of young writers have emerged that have brought their own influences to Ol' Stoney Face.

Al Ewing is one writer touted as a potential successor to Wagner. With a particular story, 'Cockroaches', earning him plaudits from critics and fans alike, his knowledge of Dredd history and his ability to capture the craziness and horror of Mega-City life has made him a fan favourite.

"Dredd's the simplest character in the world," he said. "He's also the most complicated. He's got no personality; he's got infinite layers of personality. The world he lives in is ridiculous and serious and unbelievable and realistic and noir and neon, and every week – for roughly 1,800 weeks, give or take – he's done something new in it.

"The best thing about him, for my money, is that every week he's gotten a week older and that brilliant world of his has grown just a little bit more. You can't say that about Batman."

"Dredd's terrifying to write in a lot of ways," reckons Rob Williams, who has also written several Dredd stories, including one drawn by *B.P.R.D.* artist Guy Davis. "Most characters you write go on an emotional journey. Dredd is the law. That's kind of it. He will not deviate from that so he's a hard protagonist to draw drama from." He cites Ewing as a writer who understands Dredd's character but claims he himself prefers to write about the citizens of Mega-City One. "You can't underestimate how good a job John Wagner has done with Dredd over the years. He's one of those characters that every cocky writer thinks they'd do a great job on. But he's a very tough nut to crack."

Simon Spurrier, whose *Simping Detective* series is based in Mega-City One, describes Dredd as "infuriatingly brilliant".

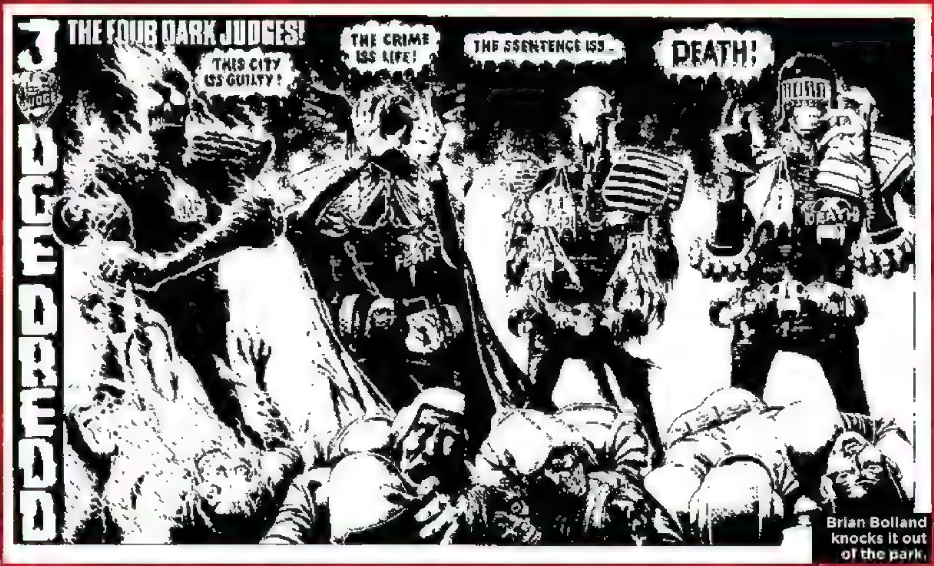
"On paper, it shouldn't work," he said. "He's a violent totalitarian who thinks democracy is the worst thing that could happen to his city, and yet we who love him (few of whom, I hope, share his philosophy) find ourselves rooting for him and sympathising with him. Partly that's down to the genius of the story's set-up: the world Dredd occupies is so insane, so pants-on-head deranged, so violently over-the-top, that his head-breaking ways seem necessary.

"But mostly it's down to John Wagner, imbuing Dredd with so much subtle complexity and truth that he somehow becomes likeable. When the rest of us write Dredd he plays an unmovable fulcrum around which an insane world turns – and a lot of those stories are very good. But when Wagner writes Dredd? He's a living breathing human. Just, y'know... with an enormous gun. And chin."

unmistakable silhouette. It also survives a myriad of different artistic interpretations and each artist has added their own stamp to his look – Ezquerra's early design showed a lean and mean Dredd, Mick McMahon popularised the look of oversized boots and shoulder pads, Brian Bolland was lauded for his cool linework and Ron Smith excelled at bringing the madness of MC1 to life. Modern masters such as Simon Bisley, Jock, Frazer Irving and Henry Flint have offered their own interpretations, each distinct but still instantly recognisable.

For such a strong character, Dredd's birth was surprisingly fractious. Wagner walked away even before the first issue after arguments with IPC management, and when the first episode was drawn by newcomer Mick McMahon without Ezquerra's knowledge, the enraged Spaniard also left. Guided by Mills, Dredd's early days were uneven as he remained a fairly one-note character. But when Wagner returned, his close working relationship with Alan Grant began to flesh out the madcap world of Mega-City One and the strip quickly took on its famous streak of black humour, served with a dish of hyper-violence.

Ezquerra's other great contribution was to envisage Mega-City One as more than just another city, an early pin-up showing gleaming mile-high starscrapers and gravity-defying walkways so delighted Mills that it formed the template for the next 35 years, a futuristic utopia laced with '70s dystopian cynicism. It is undoubtedly the contributing factor to Dredd's longevity, not only providing ample storylines for writers and endless opportunities for artists' imaginations to run riot, but also providing a focus, in contrast to what seems a fairly one-dimensional character.


3
JUDGE DREDD
THE FOUR DARK JUDGES!
THIS CITY ISS GUILTY!
THE CRIME ISS LIFE!
THE SSENTENCE ISS…
DEATH!

Brian Bolland knocks it out of the park.

In the intervening years, his list of adversaries has grown into a lunatic's menagerie – alien ghouls, a mad, mass-murdering Chief Judge who appoints a goldfish as his deputy, head-butting maniacs, serial-killing teenagers, thieves who deal in 20th century trash, reptilian alien mercenaries and rebellious robots – while he himself has been nursed into a more nuanced character, particularly in Wagner's more recent storylines. Alongside him we now have psychic judges such as Anderson Psi, tech judges, space judges and various foreign judges. For a character that has never been 'rebooted', the natural evolution of Dredd has ensured a back catalogue of inventive, surprising and at times startling stories.

It's the so-called 'mega-epic' which has sealed Dredd's reputation for large-scale storytelling, from the original but patchy 'The Cursed Earth', to 'The Apocalypse War', with its prequel 'Block War', which showed a maturity remarkable for British comics, never mind the '80s. 'Necropolis' then upped the ante, with a separate series, 'The Dead Man', beginning in *2000 AD*, which readers slowly

Dredd's world

MEGA-CITY ONE
Arguably the main character other than Dredd himself – 400 million people crammed into a towering megalopolis on the eastern seaboard of the US, surrounded by radioactive wastelands. In this giant pressure cooker, all human life is found – from crazies to criminals, uglies to fatties and their belly wheels. Both the cause of, and perfect antidote to, Dredd's monolithic law machine.

READ Pretty much any *Judge Dredd: Complete Casefiles*, but *3*, *4*, *5* and *6* are full of classic moments.

JUDGE ANDERSON
Wise-cracking physic 'Psi' judge and foil to Dredd's straight-man. She has been his indispensable ally in combating the Dark Judges and quickly secured her own popular spin-off series.

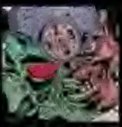
READ *Judge Anderson Psi Files 1*, *Shamballa*

WALTER THE WOBOT
Rather unbelievably, Dredd once shared his apartment with an Italian cook and an 'endearing' robot butler with a speech impediment, which was in love with its master but went from comic relief Bootlicker to a rampaging maniac.

READ *Judge Dredd: Complete Casefiles 1 & 6*, *The Henry Flint Collection*

JUDGE DEATH
An undead judge from an alternative dimension where all life was declared a crime (since reoffending rates amongst the dead are so low). Death and his fellow Dark Judges – Fear, Fire and Mortis – killed millions when they tried to turn Mega-City One into Necropolis, a city of the dead.

READ *Judge Dredd: Complete Casefiles 3 & 14*, *Judge Anderson Psi Files 1*, *Young Death*



MEAN 'MEAN MACHINE' ANGEL
A psychopathic nutcase who enjoys head-butting things, Mean was a member of the notorious Cursed Earth gang, the Angel Family. Mean's father had his arm replaced with a robotic claw, and a dial implanted in his head which serves to amp up his aggression from Mean to Brutal.

READ *Judge Dredd: Complete Casefiles 4, 6 & 8*, *Mean Machine: Real Mean*

CHOPPER
A young graffiti artist who used a levitating surfboard to evade capture, Marlon 'Chopper' Shakespeare was a symbol of teenage rebellion before returning to compete in the deadly Supersurf competition and apparently dying during the event. A regular thorn in Dredd's side.

READ *Chopper: Surf's Up*

JUDGE BEENY
Judge America Beeny is the orphan of murdered anti-judicial activist America Jara. America's friend, secretly in love with her, had his brain transplanted into her corpse after her death and gave birth to Beeny, who was inducted into the Academy of Justice and is now one of Dredd's closest protégés.

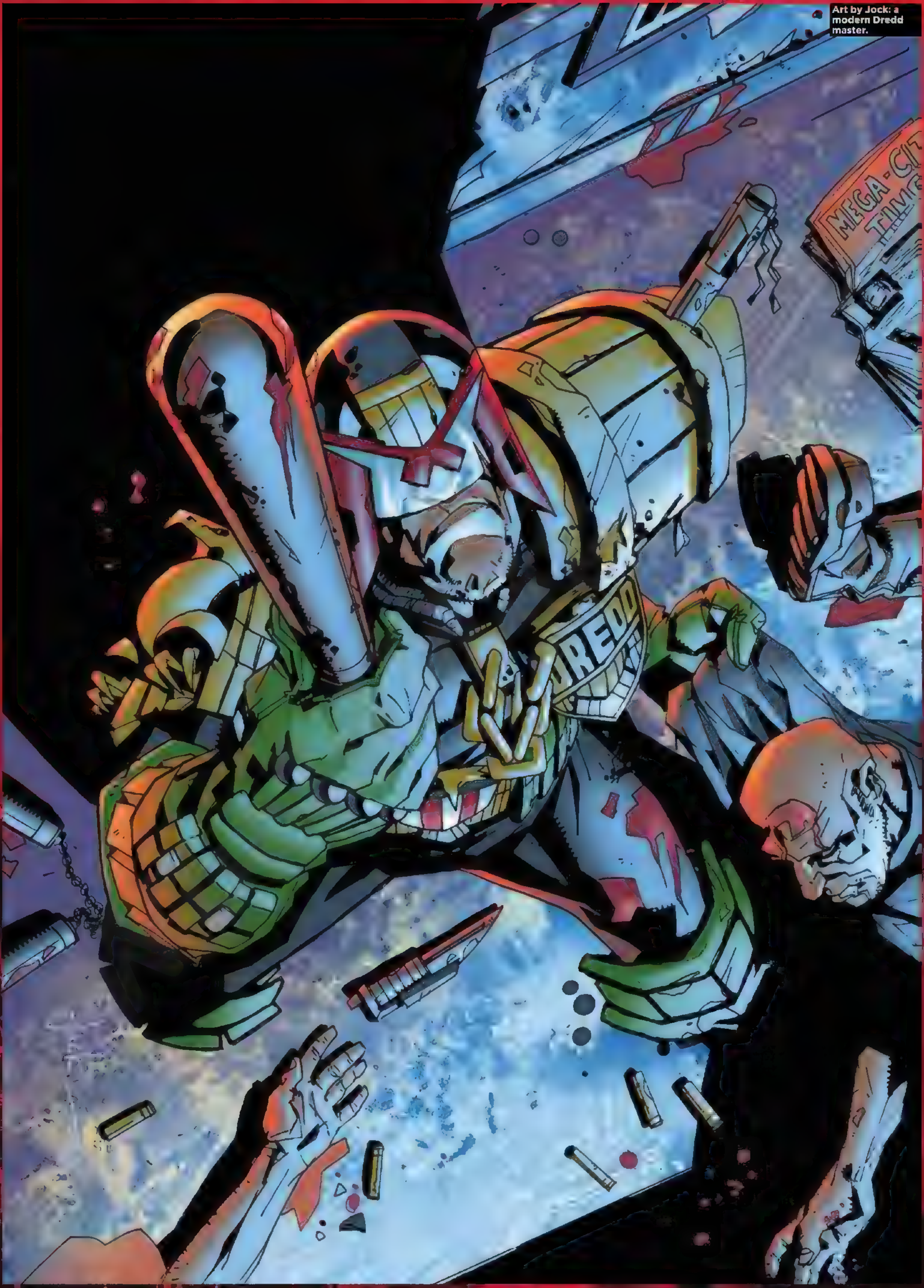
READ: *America*, *Tour of Duty: Backlash*

CHIEF JUDGE DAN FRANCISCO
After the disastrous move to admit mutants, forced through by Dredd, Chief Judge Barbara Hershey was ousted by Judge Francisco, the star of the popular TV series *The Streets of Dan Francisco*. A satire on the rise of Barack Obama, he is a well-meaning but easily manipulated judge who was nearly killed, and briefly replaced by, his deputy.

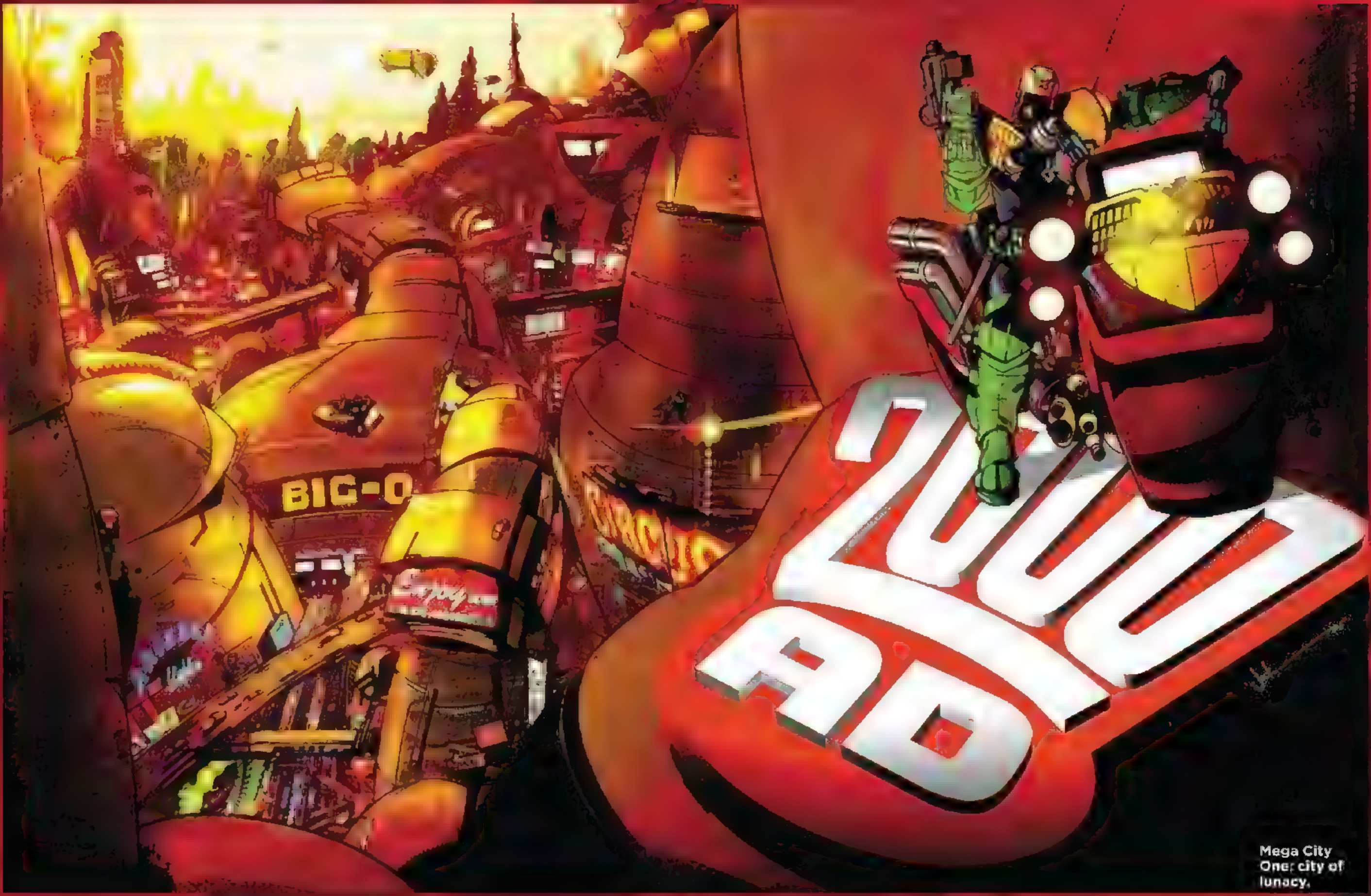
READ *Origins*, *Tour of Duty: Mega-City Justice*

PJ MAYBE
A homicidal mass-murdering bad penny, Maybe started out as a teenager who murdered his way into a fortune and his body-strewn career has rarely slowed since. He evaded Dredd's grasp to eventually become, ironically, an extremely popular Mayor of Mega-City One before being unmasked and recently escaping again.

READ *The Complete PJ Maybe*


MEGA-CIT
DREDD

Art by Jock: a modern Dredd master.



Mega City One: city of lunacy.

came to realise connected to the main *Dredd* strip in which an exiled Dredd returns to stop Judge Death and his Dark Judges slaughtering Mega-City One's entire population.

In the past decade, the strip has moved away from the shock tactics and evolved well-observed police procedurals and complex, even politically tinged, storylines. Importantly, Dredd has achieved what few others have – fame and notoriety outside these shores, helped in no small part by the waves of UK talent that got their break at *2000 AD* before heading Stateside, including Bolland, McMahon and Dave Gibbons, as well as writers such as Mark Millar, Grant Morrison and Garth Ennis.

UNLIKELY HERO

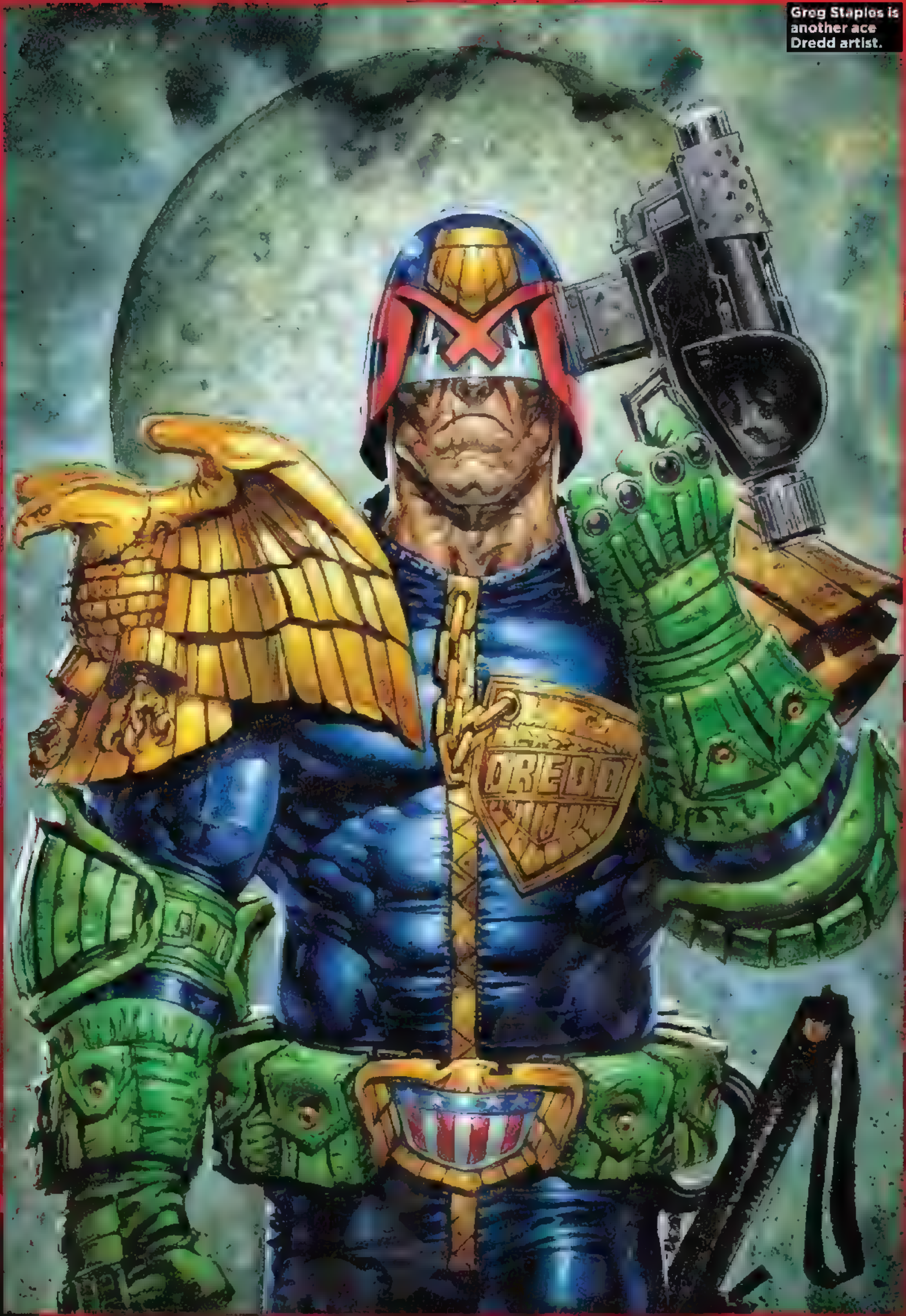
Along with *2000 AD*, Dredd has outlasted the once-crowded domestic comic book industry, even managing to just about survive the disastrously camp and muddled Hollywood adaptation starring Sylvester Stallone, with a hopefully-more-faithful movie written by Alex Garland (the man behind *28 Days Later* and *Trainspotting*) on the way. The '90s were a lean time, with *2000 AD* flirting with cancellation, but the 21st century has seen a grand surge for both Dredd and the title itself in quality.

So what is it about Dredd that has meant he has lasted 35 years on the streets of Mega-City One? Why are his fans some of the most committed and, at times, rabidly devoted?

Could it be simply that there is no limit to the inventiveness of Dredd's world? Mega-City One is a mirror in which the insecurities and insanities of modern life are reflected, from fashionable fads that are over by lunchtime to fears over terrorism and civil liberties. Part dystopian SF and part satirical black comedy, the lawman is Plato's Republic, Hobbes'

Mega-City One terms & lingo

Drokk	The most common expletive, generally understood to mean f***
Stomm	Shit
Perp	Criminal
Fattie	Morbidly hyper-obese citizen, often sporting a supportive wheel for their belly
Futsie	A citizen driven mad by 'future shock syndrome'
Grud on a greenie	'Oh my goodness!'
Lawgiver	A judge's gun, which can fire six different types of bullet – standard, high explosive, armour piercing, incendiary, heat-seeker and ricochet. Explodes if used by an unauthorised person
Lawmaster	A judge's motorbike, equipped with machine guns and 'Cyclops' laser
Block War	When neighbouring blocks go to war, often over the smallest of offences
Grud	In a city of 11,017 registered religions, this is the widely-used alternative name for God
Resyk	Not even the dead go to waste in MC1 – Resyk plants take bodies and recycle them into useful products
Juve	A youngster, probably up to no good
The Cursed Earth	Vast radioactive wasteland stretching across America, caused by the great Atomic War of the mid 21st century. Only Mega-Cities One and Three remain as lone outposts of civilisation (Mega-City Two having been blown up by Dredd during the Judgement Day saga)
Muties	Inhabitants of the Cursed Earth mutated by radioactivity and chemical contamination. Recently allowed to live in Mega-City One, with terrible consequences
Iso-Cube	An individual cell in one of Mega-City One's vast prison blocks
Ugly	Another MC1 fad, where citizens purposefully make themselves increasingly unattractive, usually using one of entrepreneur Otto Sump's products
SJS	Special Judicial Squad, the brutal and sinister internal police of the Judges
Rookie	A trainee judge, distinguished by their white helmets and 'half-eagle' badges
Wally Squad	Undercover judges


Greg Staples is another ace Dredd artist.

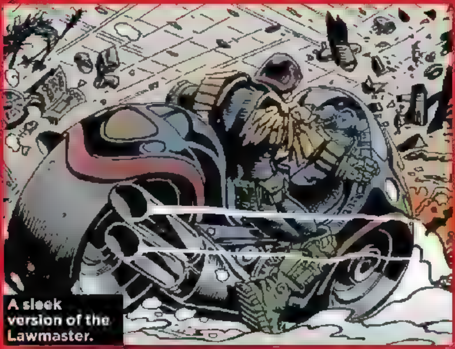
Leviathan and Nietzsche's Superman all rolled into one: an unapologetic fascist who serves a brutal, ruthless and repressive system but whose very inflexibility – incorruptible and principled – makes him a sympathetic anti-hero. He's a black and white character set in a riotous world of colour.

Like all good comic book characters, he's a simple concept, but those who consider him a fascist cop and nothing more are missing the point. The allure comes from the many stories that can be extrapolated from that idea. Although notoriously difficult to write well, that deceptive simplicity means he is also accessible without having to gobble up reams of continuity; in the maelstrom of a changing world, Dredd is the only constant.

Yet even in this man-monolith, Wagner has subtly added depth and character. After decades on the street and near-constant physical stress he is physically getting older – each year that his readership ages, so does Dredd. He is by any standards the greatest mass murderer in history (having destroyed at least six mega-cities), he has doubted and rejected the very system he serves, only to return to save it; he was recently treated for cancer and complains of old wounds; his indestructibility has virtually become a gag in his own strip, rather than some deity-given super power; he is sidelined by those who consider him a dinosaur.

While the 1995 movie gave him a level of awareness far beyond the pages of *2000 AD*, Dredd's comic book adventures remain a relatively select taste outside of the UK. The new film, due in September, may change that, but part of Dredd's charm is that even through the ups and downs, through the fads and mega-epics, he has ploughed his own furrow.

The black humour, the violence, the dark tinge of cynicism, the dystopia flavoured with wild, exaggerated madness – Judge Dredd has lasted this long because there are, literally, 400 million stories in the Mega-City… and we've so far heard only 35 years' worth of them. CH


A sleek version of the Lawmaster.

"Stomm! Where the drokk do I start?!"

With 35 years of stories, many of them standalone, it can seem daunting to suddenly launch into the world of Mega-City One. If you want to start right from the beginning, then the phonebook-sized *Complete Casefiles* from Rebellion are ideal, but here are some classics that are essential reading...

JUDGE DREDD COMPLETE CASEFILES 5
Classic stories such as 'Hotdog Run' lead up to the first 'mega-epic', 'The Apocalypse War', when MC1 is invaded by the Soviets and Dredd as we know him emerges. A true classic, its effect undimmed by the intervening years, and still affecting the strip to this day – as shown by the slow-burning epic that continues with the current 'Day of Chaos' storyline running in *2000 AD*.

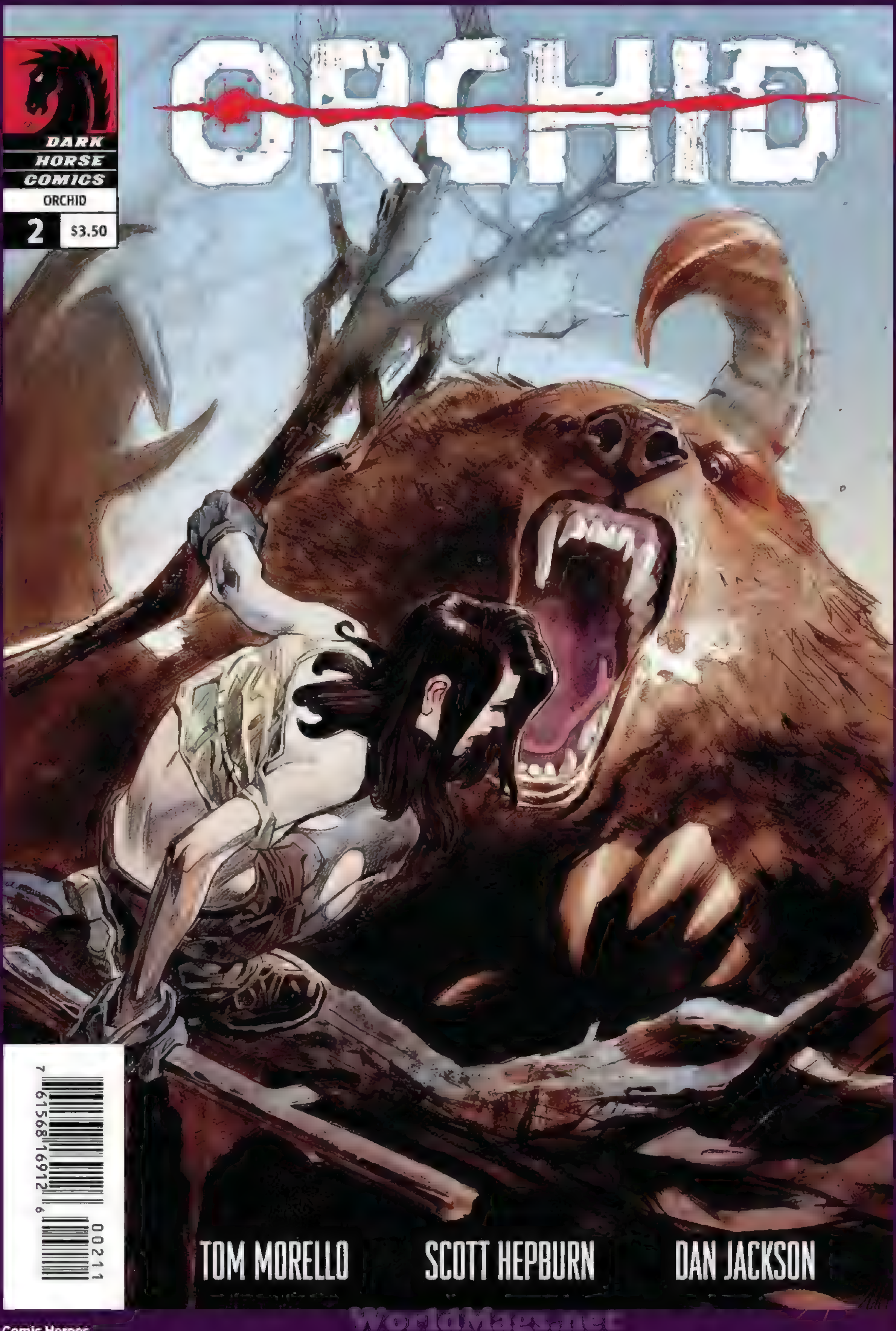
JUDGE DREDD COMPLETE CASEFILES 14
The mega-epic 'Necropolis' brought together threads from the previous decade, culminating in Dredd becoming disillusioned with the justice system and choosing exile in the Cursed Earth. Meanwhile, the Dark Judges begin their scheme to take over Mega-City One.

AMERICA
Arguably the best Dredd story ever written and the moment the recent, morally complex 'modern' phase of Dredd began. Written for the fledgling *Judge Dredd Megazine* by Wagner in 1990, the story explored notions of freedom, terrorism, hope, obsession and blind obedience, and its ramifications have been felt throughout *Dredd* ever since.

THE PIT
Mega-City One meets *The Wire* a decade before the latter existed, as Dredd cleans up a rotten city sector with the classic opening line: "My name is Dredd. You may have heard of me. I am a stickler."

MECHANISMO
In this story, beautifully drawn by Colin MacNeil, manpower shortages see robot judges on the streets... with deadly results.

JUDGE DREDD: ORIGINS,
JUDGE DREDD: TOUR OF DUTY &
JUDGE DREDD: MEGA-CITY JUSTICE
Three books containing Dredd's most recent storylines, starting with his own 'origin story' and then dealing with the wide-ranging implications of his fight for justice for the exiled mutant population.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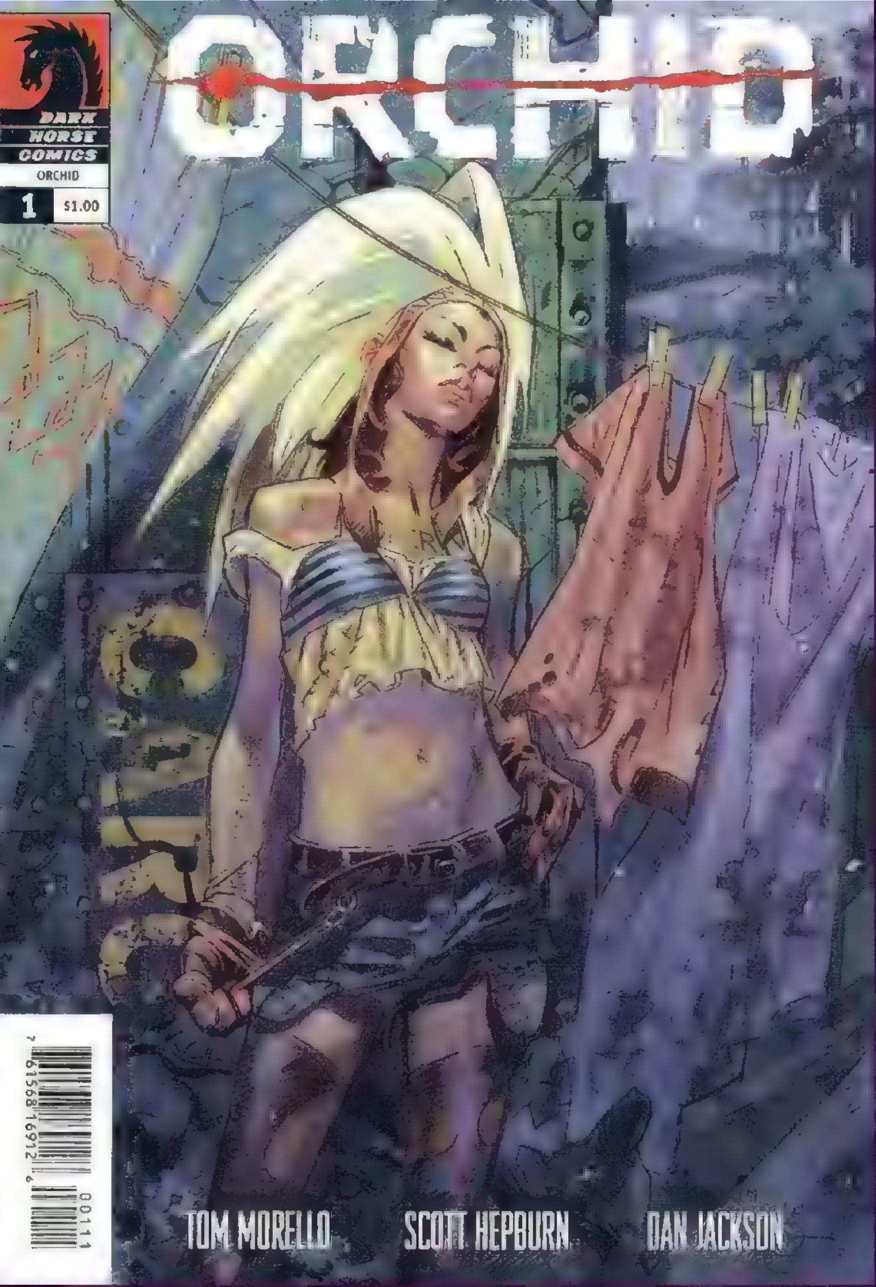
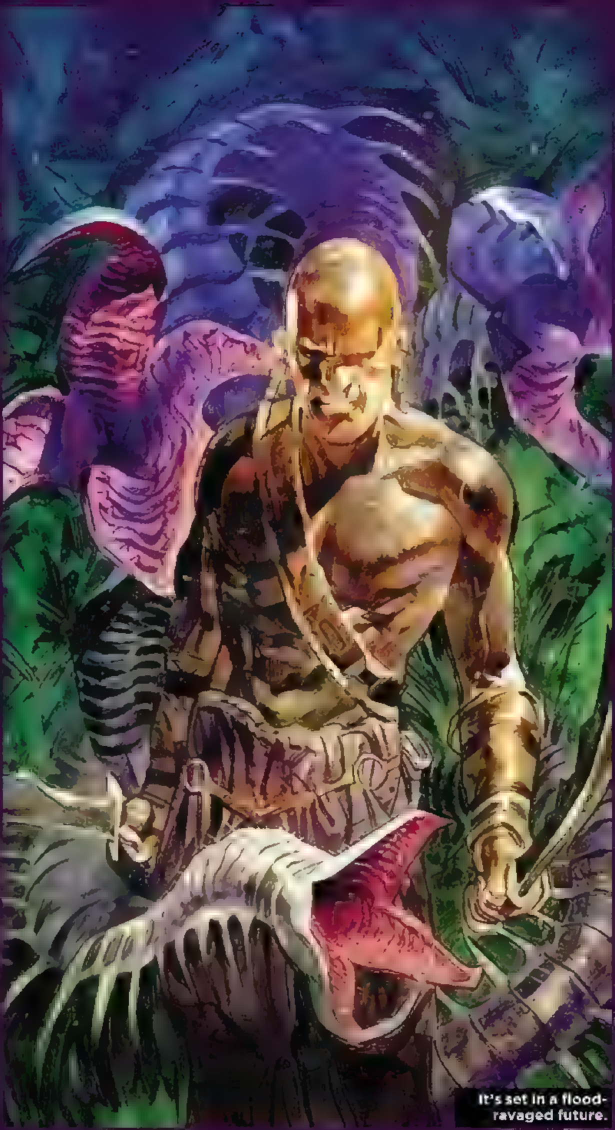
ORCHID
TOM MORELLO
SCOTT HEPBURN
DAN JACKSON




It's set in a flood-ravaged future.

DARK FLOWER

Rage Against The Machine guitarist Tom Morello turns to comics

From My Chemical Romance frontman Gerard Way's *Umbrella Academy* to Fall Out Boy bassist Pete Wentz's *Fall Out Toy Works*, many rock musicians have tried their hands at comic books with varying degrees of success and involvement. Now Rage Against The Machine/Audioslave guitarist Tom Morello has taken time out from his various musical endeavours to team up with *Star Wars* artist Scott Hepburn on new Dark Horse series *Orchid*. And like Way, who won over sceptical fans with his cleverly nuanced, esoteric scripts, the Harlem-born 47-year-old has written every single word himself.

"I'm very obsessive about it," laughs Morello when I meet him at the Dark Horse's booth just before he headlined New York Comic Con's opening night concert under his solo guise, The Nightwatchman. "I've been driving my editors at Dark Horse crazy. They're like, 'It was due yesterday,' and I'm like, 'No, the punctuation isn't right or I need more shading on the side'. I take it very, very seriously."

It was Way who recommended Morello to the Milwaukee-based independent publisher. "Gerard is a friend of mine, so when I had this story, I called him up and sent it over to him," recalls Morello. "He liked it and put me in touch with the people at Dark Horse."

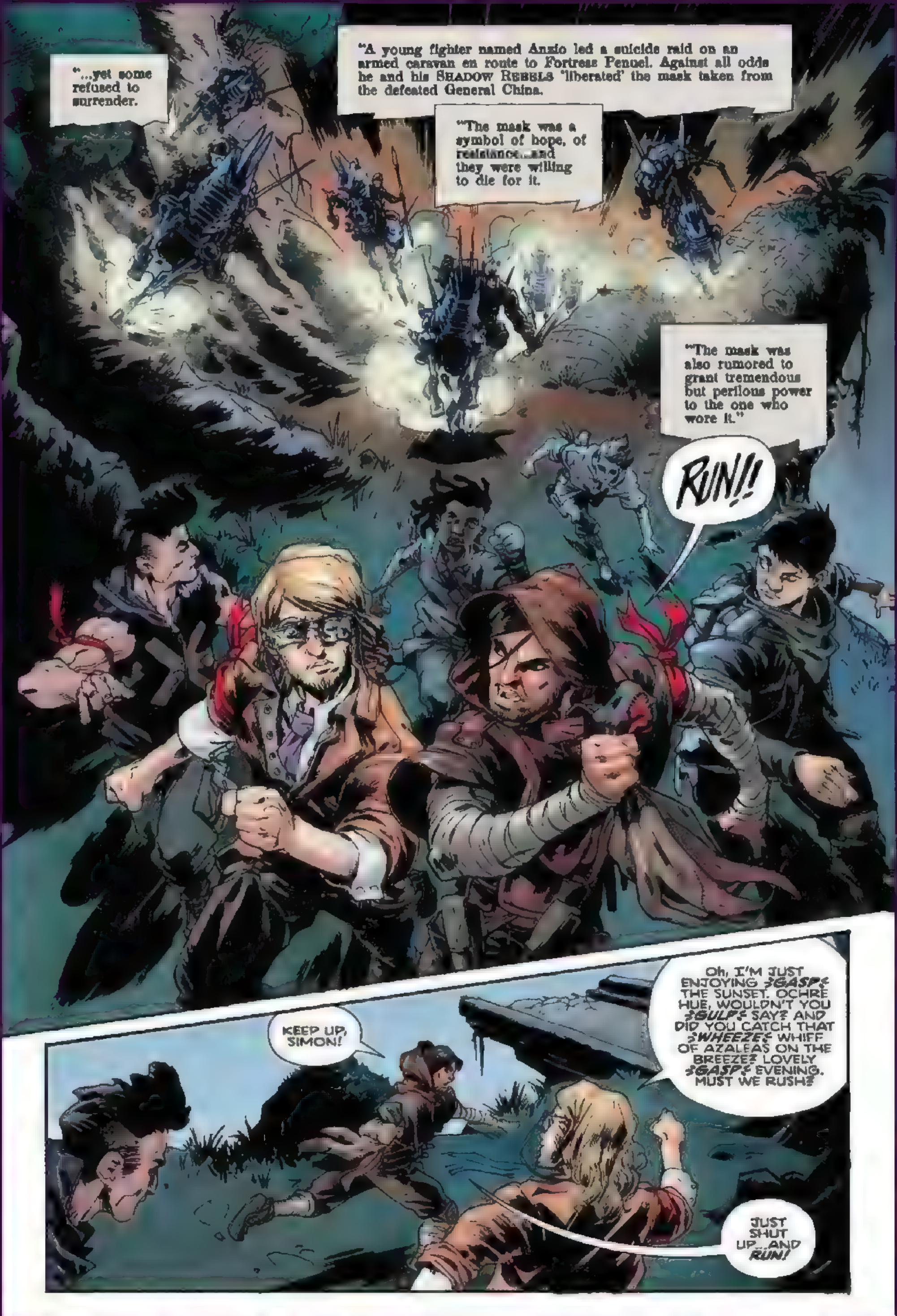
Described as part Suicide Girl, part Joan of Arc, *Orchid* combines *Game Of Thrones*-esque fantasy with gritty *Mad Max*-style sci-fi. It centres on the struggles of the titular 16-year-old street prostitute as she attempts to fend for herself in a grim post-apocalyptic environment. The word 'property' writ large across Orchid's chest means that her lowly social status is there for all to see.

"When I first moved to Los Angeles, I wasn't accepted into the hard rock community because I didn't have the right hair length or the right colour skin," says Morello, who is of mixed Irish, Italian and Kenyan descent. "The first community that really welcomed me was this kind of gang of drug addicts and prostitutes in the East Side LA rock scene. I grew up in a very conservative suburb and I went to Harvard University so I'd never met people like that before. But they were the kindest

Left: Girls and bears – a surefire recipe for comics success.

Author photograph © Sean Ricigliano

Tom Morello, yesterday.


"...yet some refused to surrender.
"A young fighter named Anzio led a suicide raid on an armed caravan en route to Fortress Penuel. Against all odds he and his SHADOW REBELS 'liberated' the mask taken from the defeated General China.
"The mask was a symbol of hope, of resistance...and they were willing to die for it.
"The mask was also rumored to grant tremendous but perilous power to the one who wore it."
RUN!!
KEEP UP, SIMON!
Oh, I'M JUST ENJOYING ƸGASPƷ THE SUNSET. OCHRE HUE, WOULDN'T YOU ƸGULPƷ SAY? AND DID YOU CATCH THAT ƸWHEEZEƷ WHIFF OF AZALEAS ON THE BREEZE? LOVELY ƸGASPƷ EVENING. MUST WE RUSH?
JUST SHUT UP...AND RUN!

most open-hearted people that I've ever met and they accepted me when no-one else would. So *Orchid* reflects some of those characters – they're really hard but they also have big hearts."

While Rage Against The Machine are renowned for their incendiary lyrics – Morello played an acoustic set at the Occupy Wall Street encampment on the same afternoon that we met – *Orchid* downplays political subtext in favour of enthralling plotlines. "I didn't want to compromise anything with regards to the story," he says.

"I wanted there to be great monsters, epic escapes and huge battles. But whereas in typical fantasy dramas it's always about getting the king back on the throne or saving the princess, in *Orchid* it's the king who's the bad guy, so I've inverted the pyramid."

BOAT PEOPLE

Morello doesn't pinpoint the precise location of his troubled land but it's set in a distant future after the genetic codes have been shattered and the seas have risen.

"The terrain that we've used for it is Bolivia," he reveals. "The idea is that there's been a second Noah's Ark-type flood and after the waters recede the only people that remain have been adrift on these cannibal barges for centuries, so it could be a boat from Uganda that's ended up in Bolivia.

"The world has become scrambled but the one thing that I wanted to stay away from – the one thing that doesn't exist – is race. There are sharp class divisions but there are no race divisions. It's a race neutral planet because racism just ran out of steam. Those things can become convoluted and I wanted to keep the emphasis clearly on class."

Spread over 12 issues, Morello is gradually revealing the details of his intricately-designed world. "There are some big characters, who have still to rear their heads," he teases. "Orchid is slowly figuring out who she is in this world and there are a lot of challenges coming up. I wanted the violence in the series to be unrelenting and to be representative of a world where the only hope one has of survival is to really push back."

Morello has formed a bond with Scott Hepburn that rivals the rapport that he shares with his numerous musical partners. "We searched for a year to find the right person and some very big artists threw their names into the ring," he says.

"But the chemistry wasn't right and one of the things that I've learned from being in a band is that you need that chemistry to get the right end product. The first time that Scott and I talked on the phone we got on famously and he sent me over sketches of three of the characters. I immediately thought, 'This is the guy'."

Above: With Gerard Way and Courtney Taylor, Morello's in good rock comic writer company.

Beginning with a track from The Nightwatchman's recently released second album, each issue of *Orchid* is accompanied by a special downloadable song. "I wanted to build a bridge between the two worlds and for *Orchid* #2 through #12, it'll be an instrumental," says Morello.

"I've scored a number of films, including working on the two *Iron Mans*, but the particular inspiration for the instrumental music was Peter Gabriel's *Passion*.

"There was also a brilliant art show called Ashes And Snow, which came through LA a couple of years ago. It had a great soundtrack and it was the first time that I'd seen something like that made up of a mixture of mediums. It was one of the things that inspired me to try mixing comic books and soundtracks." CH

COMIC HEROES

NEXT ISSUE

THE AVENGERS

Inside the film of the year

PLUS!

- Frederik Peeters
- Women in comics
- Jonathan Ross and Tommy Lee Edwards' *Golden Age*
- Howard Chaykin
- Eddie Campbell
- China Miéville
- The Art of Matt Wagner
- Greg Rucka
- Morrison and Quitely on *Flex Mentallo*
- Tarzan
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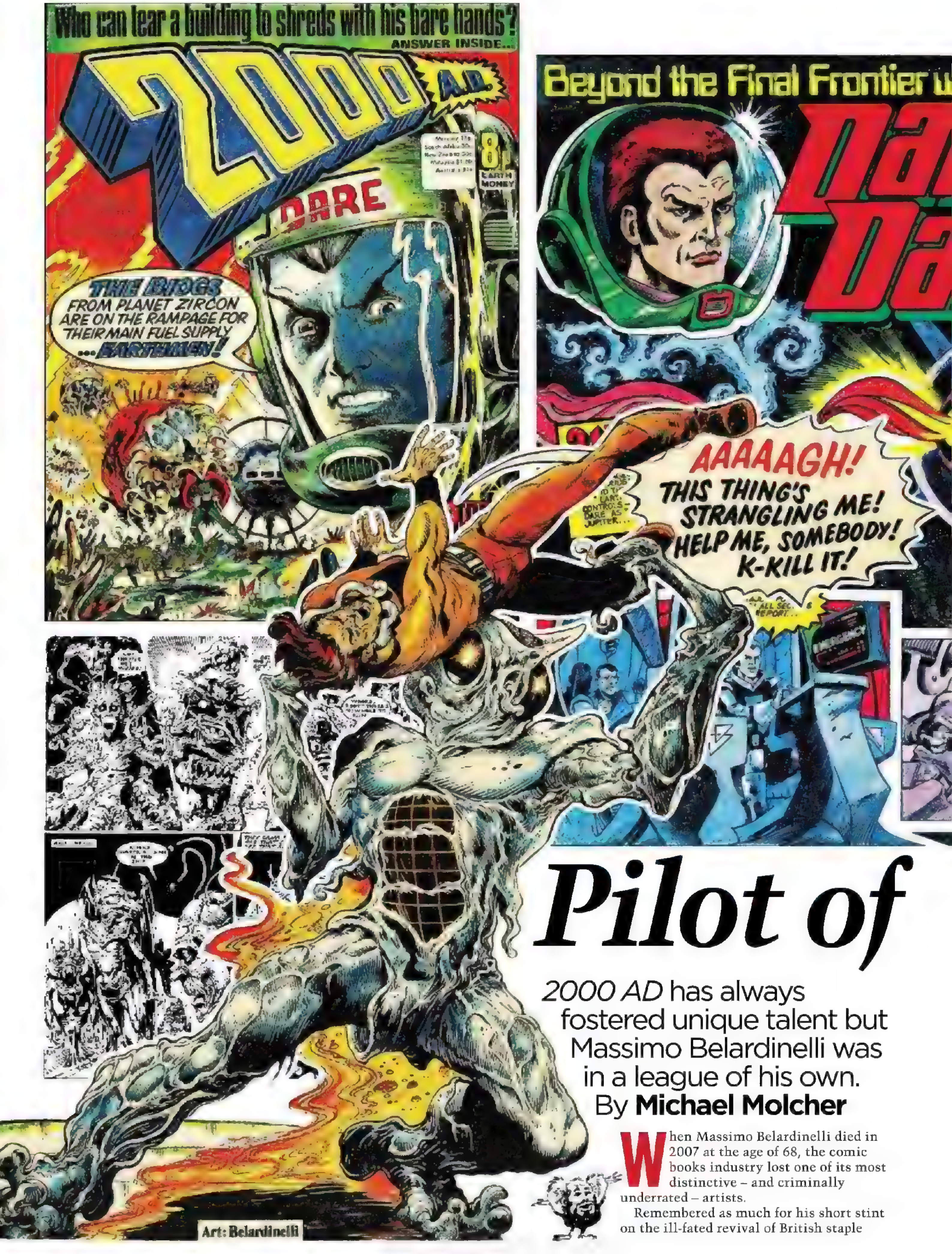

Who can tear a building to shreds with his bare hands?
ANSWER INSIDE...
2000 A.D.
8p EARTH MONEY
DARE
THE BIOGS FROM PLANET ZIRCON ARE ON THE RAMPAGE FOR THEIR MAIN FUEL SUPPLY ...EARTHMEN!
Beyond the Final Frontier w
AAAAAGH! THIS THING'S STRANGLING ME! HELP ME, SOMEBODY! K-KILL IT!

Art: Belardinelli

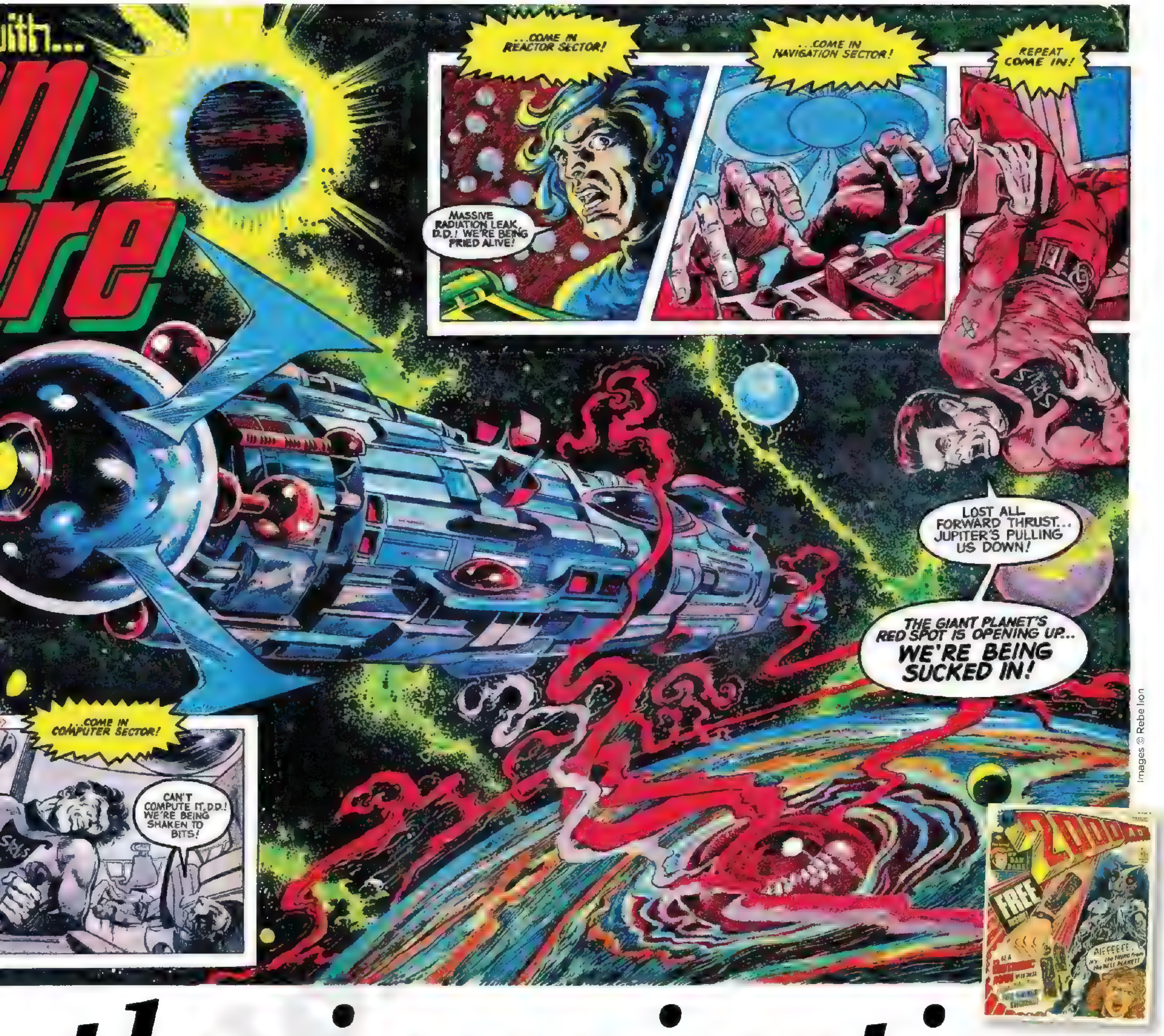
Pilot of

2000 AD has always fostered unique talent but Massimo Belardinelli was in a league of his own.

By **Michael Molcher**

When Massimo Belardinelli died in 2007 at the age of 68, the comic books industry lost one of its most distinctive – and criminally underrated – artists.

Remembered as much for his short stint on the ill-fated revival of British staple


...COME IN REACTOR SECTOR!
...COME IN NAVIGATION SECTOR!
REPEAT COME IN!
MASSIVE RADIATION LEAK, D.D.! WE'RE BEING FRIED ALIVE!
LOST ALL FORWARD THRUST... JUPITER'S PULLING US DOWN!
THE GIANT PLANET'S RED SPOT IS OPENING UP... WE'RE BEING SUCKED IN!
...COME IN COMPUTER SECTOR!
CAN'T COMPUTE IT, D.D.! WE'RE BEING SHAKEN TO BITS!
2000 AD
FREE
AIEEEEE...

Images © Rebellion

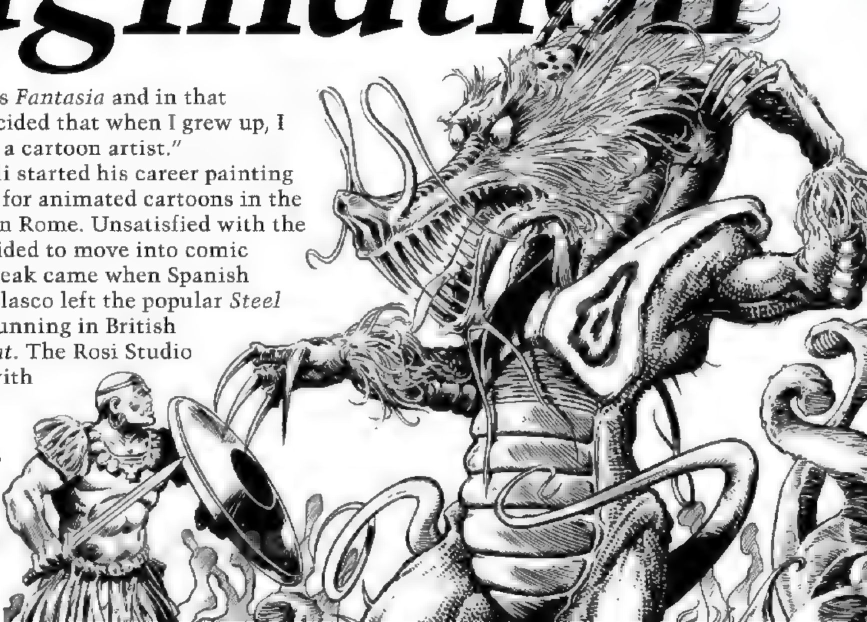
the imagination

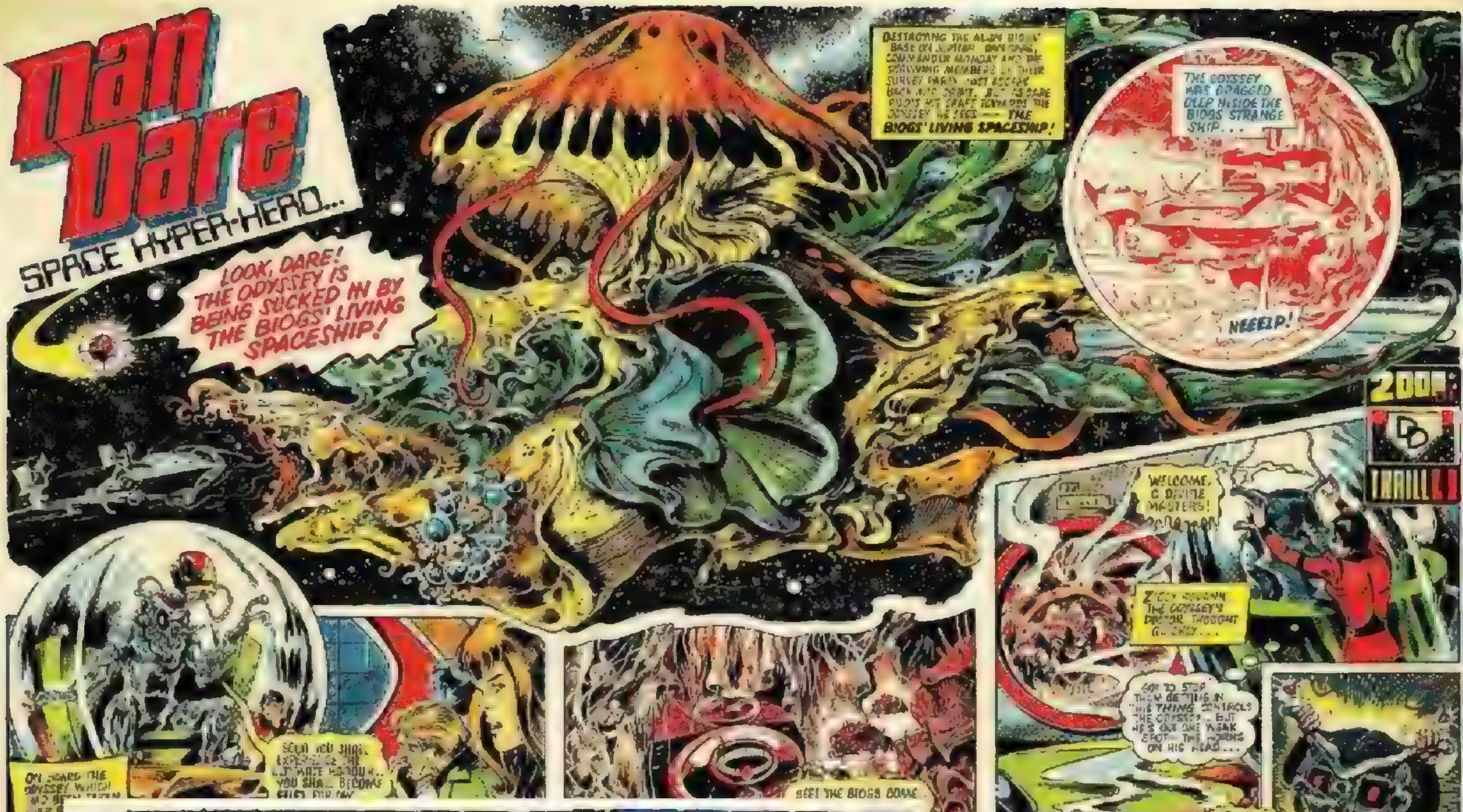
Dan Dare, the Italian artist went on to help define the look of *2000 AD*, bringing a splash of European flair to a title that relied heavily on hard-edged SF violence.

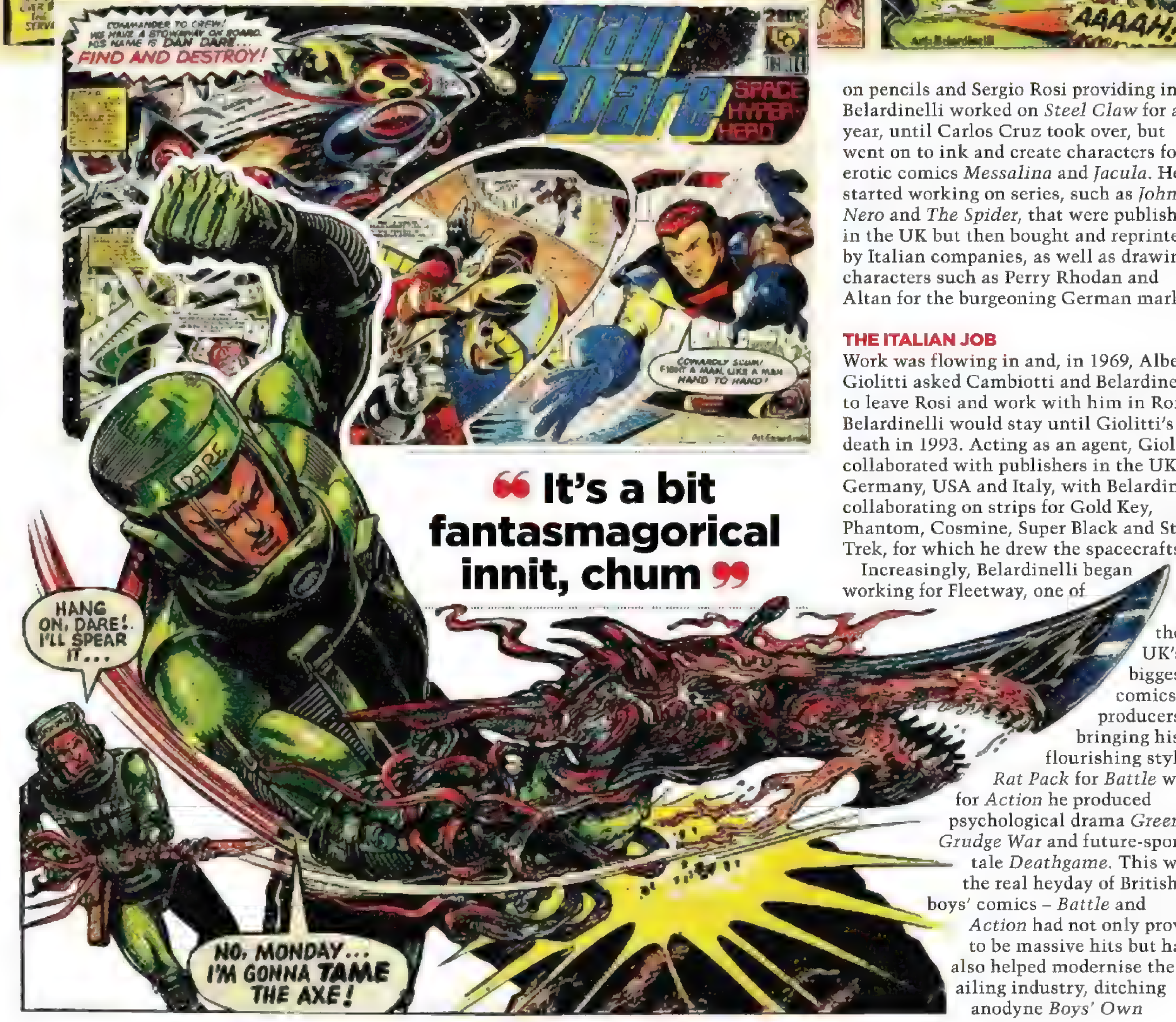
Belardinelli's fantastical landscapes – from motley crews of alien truckers spouting mock-CB language, to bizarre worlds filled with half-human half-animal creatures – and delicate brushwork became a highlight of the comic's heyday.

Born in Rome on 5 June 1938, he was exposed to art at an early age – his father painted oil figures on canvas as a hobby – and in an interview for the European fanzine *INK*, he revealed his earliest inspiration: "When I was very little my mother took me to the cinema to watch Walt Disney's *Fantasia* and in that moment I decided that when I grew up, I wanted to be a cartoon artist."

Belardinelli started his career painting backgrounds for animated cartoons in the Rosi Studio in Rome. Unsatisfied with the work, he decided to move into comic strips. His break came when Spanish artist Jesús Blasco left the popular *Steel Claw*, then running in British comic *Valiant*. The Rosi Studio stepped in, with Belardinelli drawing backgrounds, Giorgio Cambiotti »




Dan Dare
SPACE HYPER-HERO...
DESTROYING THE ALIEN BIOGS' BASE ON JUPITER DAN DARE, COMMANDER MONDAY AND THE SURVIVING MEMBERS OF THEIR SURVEY PARTY MUST ESCAPE BACK INTO ORBIT. BUT AS DARE PILOTS HIS CRAFT TOWARDS THE ODYSSEY HE SEES — THE BIOGS' LIVING SPACESHIP!
THE ODYSSEY WAS DRAGGED DEEP INSIDE THE BIOGS STRANGE SHIP...
NEEELP!
LOOK, DARE! THE ODYSSEY IS BEING SUCKED IN BY THE BIOGS' LIVING SPACESHIP!
2000AD
THRILL
WELCOME, O DIVINE MASTERS!
AAAAH!


COMMANDER TO CREW! WE HAVE A STOWAWAY ON BOARD. HIS NAME IS DAN DARE... FIND AND DESTROY!
Dan Dare
SPACE HYPER-HERO
2000AD
COWARDLY SCUM! FIGHT A MAN LIKE A MAN HAND TO HAND!
DARE
HANG ON, DARE! I'LL SPEAR IT...
NO, MONDAY... I'M GONNA TAME THE AXE!

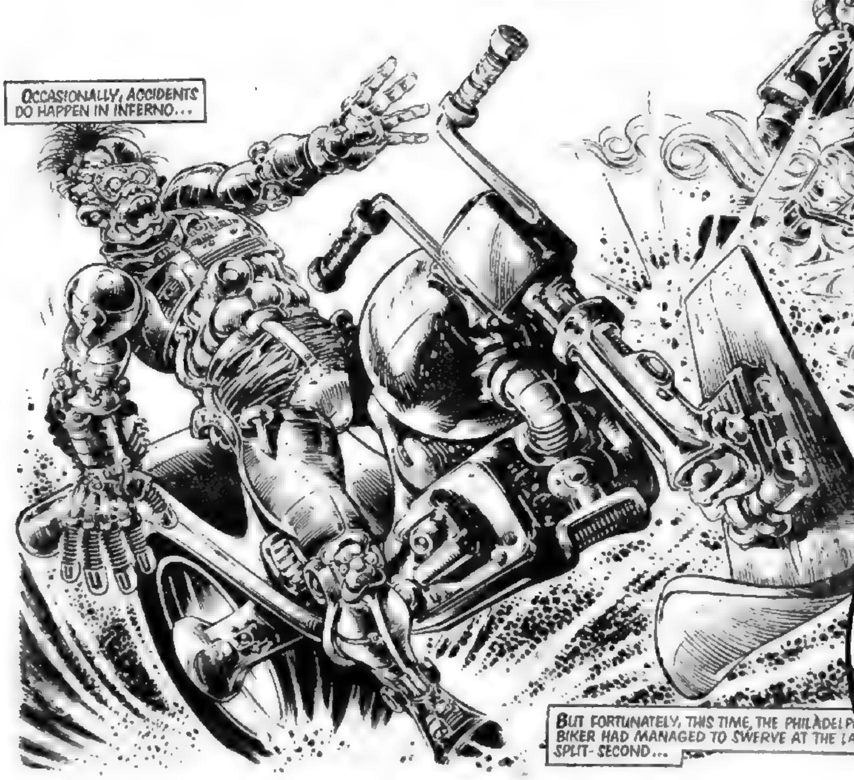
on pencils and Sergio Rosi providing inks. Belardinelli worked on *Steel Claw* for a year, until Carlos Cruz took over, but went on to ink and create characters for erotic comics *Messalina* and *Jacula*. He started working on series, such as *Johnny Nero* and *The Spider*, that were published in the UK but then bought and reprinted by Italian companies, as well as drawing characters such as Perry Rhodan and Altan for the burgeoning German market.

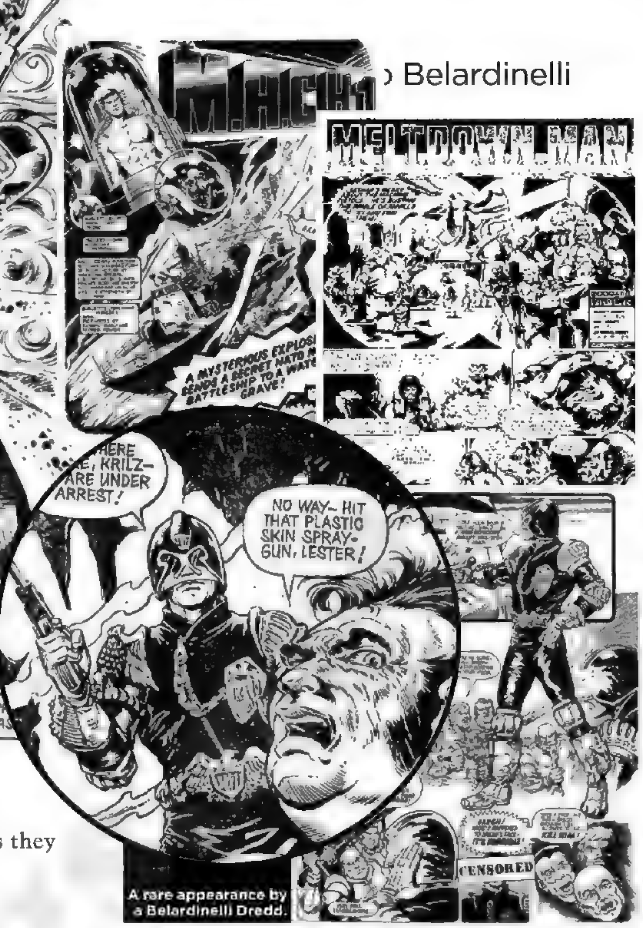
THE ITALIAN JOB

Work was flowing in and, in 1969, Alberto Giolitti asked Cambiotti and Belardinelli to leave Rosi and work with him in Rome. Belardinelli would stay until Giolitti's death in 1993. Acting as an agent, Giolitti collaborated with publishers in the UK, Germany, USA and Italy, with Belardinelli collaborating on strips for Gold Key, Phantom, Cosmine, Super Black and Star Trek, for which he drew the spacecrafts.

> **“It's a bit fantasmagorical innit, chum”**

Increasingly, Belardinelli began working for Fleetway, one of the UK's biggest comics producers, bringing his flourishing style to *Rat Pack* for *Battle* while for *Action* he produced psychological drama *Green's Grudge War* and future-sports tale *Deathgame*. This was the real heyday of British boys' comics – *Battle* and *Action* had not only proved to be massive hits but had also helped modernise the ailing industry, ditching anodyne *Boys' Own*


OCCASIONALLY, ACCIDENTS DO HAPPEN IN INFERNO...
BUT FORTUNATELY, THIS TIME, THE PHILADELP BIKER HAD MANAGED TO SWERVE AT THE LAS SPLIT-SECOND...


M.A.C.H. 1
MELTDOWN MAN
A MYSTERIOUS EXPLOS SENDS A SECRET NATO BATTLESHIP TO A WAT GRAVE!
HERE E, KRILZ- ARE UNDER ARREST!
NO WAY- HIT THAT PLASTIC SKIN SPRAY-GUN, LESTER!
CENSORED

A rare appearance by a Belardinelli Dredd.

adventure and 'Tally Ho!' heroism in favour of gun-toting violence and glowering anti-heroes.

So, when the success of *Star Wars* revealed an unrecognised market for sci-fi, Pat Mills, a young editor at Fleetway, was asked to put together a new title to capitalise on the fad. Mills had employed Belardinelli at *Battle* so, in 1977, he selected him to work on a revival of that most British of comic icons – Dan Dare.

Loaded with cultural significance, Dare was always going to be a controversial choice. He was intended to be the centrepiece of the fledgling title, bringing the veteran character out of retirement (or, rather, cryogenic sleep) and into a much more dangerous cosmos, more in keeping with *2000 AD*'s grittier focus.

"Initially I drew Dan Dare according to whatever came to mind," Belardinelli told *INK*. "However, after editing it was decided that he should resemble the pop star David Bowie, so I had to correct some episodes, redrawing all the heads."

The first issue's initial double page spread is a dream for Belardinelli fans, but it came as an awful shock for anyone expecting Frank Hampson's detailed painting. Gone were the gleaming 1950s spaceships manned by officers who'd sound more at home piloting a Spitfire, replaced by Belardinelli's weird ships covered with razor-sharp fins, their vast engines emitting ethereal trails as they sped through space.

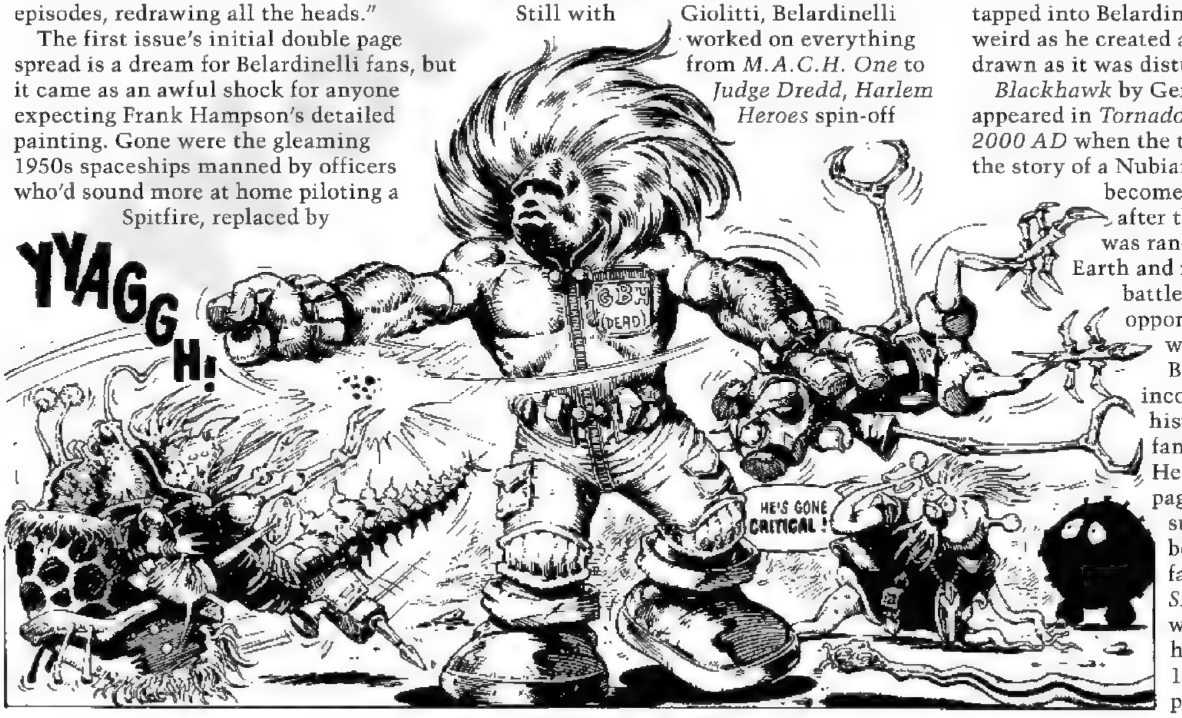
DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

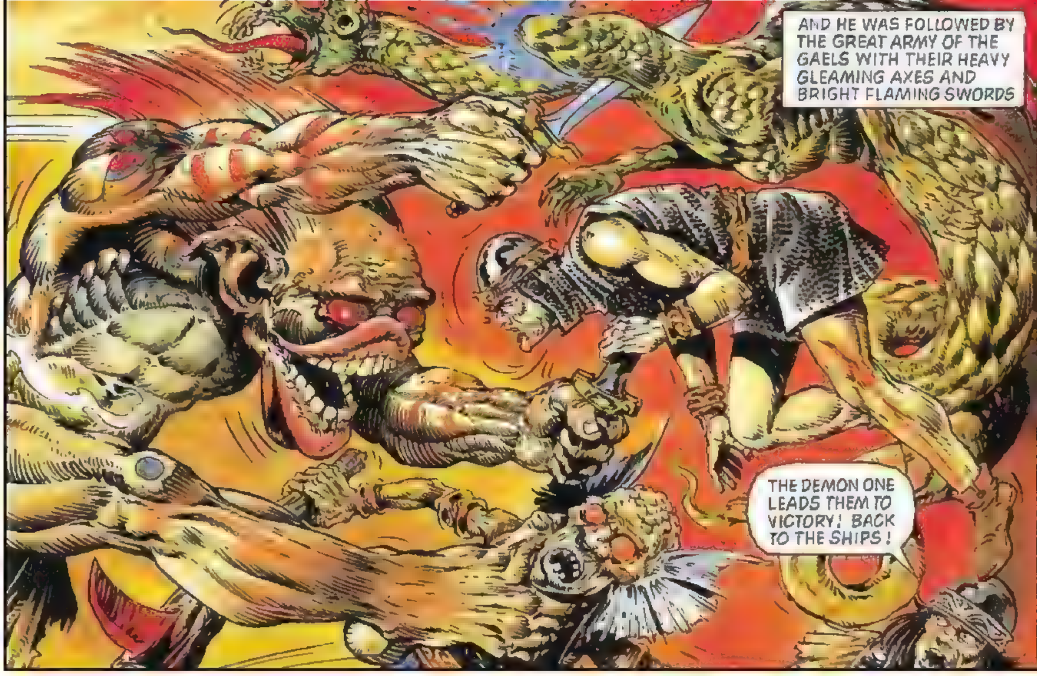
Unfortunately, such a radical take on an established character didn't go down well with readers and, after a year, he was replaced. Belardinelli, though, had gained his foothold at *2000 AD* and would go on to become one of its mainstays.

Mills thought *2000 AD* allowed the artist to flourish. "It brought out his fantasy skills. It was always incredibly exciting. I was thrilled to bits by it. It had a buzz which is rare in comics," he told the *Judge Dredd Megazine* in 2007. "Or, as the managing editor sneered at the time when Massimo drew Dan Dare and I was totally high on his art, 'It's a bit fantasmagorical innit, chum?' Ultimately Massimo paid for being too fantasmagorical and I'm sad about that."

Still with Giolitti, Belardinelli worked on everything from *M.A.C.H. One* to *Judge Dredd*, *Harlem Heroes* spin-off *Inferno* to the *Mean Team*. In retrospect, *Meltdown Man* was tailor-made for him. Written by Alan Hebden, it features an ex-SAS officer called Nick Stone who is blasted by a nuclear explosion into a potential future where he discovers a world of lazy humans who have created a race of hybrid slaves called Yujees. It was the ideal playground for Belardinelli's imagination and he conjured up anthropomorphic nightmares that didn't just look good, but made sense as well. It's an epic piece of work and holds the record for the longest consecutive run by a writer and artist team in *2000 AD*, with 50 unbroken episodes over 250 pages. It was the first series that really tapped into Belardinelli's flair for the weird as he created a world as well drawn as it was disturbing.

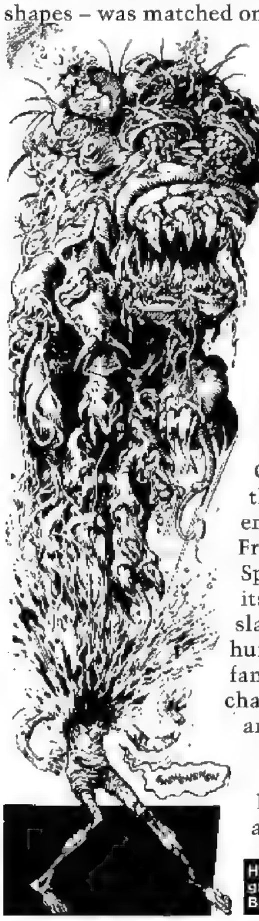
Blackhawk by Gerry Finley-Day appeared in *Tornado* before transferring to *2000 AD* when the two merged. Originally the story of a Nubian slave who eventually becomes a Roman Centurion, after the merger Blackhawk was randomly whisked from Earth and forced into gladiatorial battles against alien opponents. Yet again, this was perfect for Belardinelli who incorporated detailed historical imagery into a fantastical sci-fi setting. He was churning out pages but his style never suffered and he steadily became a reader favourite. His work on *Sláine*, though – for which he drew a handful of episodes in 1983 – was not as popular. Despite his


YYAGGH!
GBH
(DEAD)
HE'S GONE CRITICAL!


AND HE WAS FOLLOWED BY THE GREAT ARMY OF THE GAELS WITH THEIR HEAVY GLEAMING AXES AND BRIGHT FLAMING SWORDS
THE DEMON ONE LEADS THEM TO VICTORY! BACK TO THE SHIPS!

fantasy genre influences, some fans felt his work compared poorly to other artists on the series. Mills himself, though, has gone on record as stating that Belardinelli's monstrous depiction of Sláine's 'warp spasm' – when the adrenaline-fuelled warrior's body would warp, bend and swell into grotesque shapes – was matched only by Simon Bisley's legendary run.

But it is *Ace Trucking Co.* for which he is probably most fondly remembered – a bizarre comedy series by John Wagner and Alan Grant that followed pointy-headed alien space trucker Ace Garp and his co-pilot GBH, along with the freakish engineer Feek the Freek, in the ship Speedo Ghost. With its mix of CB radio slang, slapstick humour and fantastical characters, it was another strip that seemed tailor-made for Belardinelli's absurdist imagination. The series was supposedly created by Wagner and Grant specifically for Belardinelli, after he requested a series featuring lots of different types of aliens, and they created a vast menagerie of extraterrestrials in the increasingly oddball series, which included stories such as 'The Ughbug Bloos', 'Bamfeezled' and 'Stowaway Lugjacker'. The strips were helped by Belardinelli's sense of humour and he littered his work with self-deprecating self-portraits and images of his peers. Even though virtually none of those who worked with him actually met him in the flesh, all enjoyed his unassuming, friendly nature.


Hyper-detailed organic grotesqueries abound in Belardinelli's work.

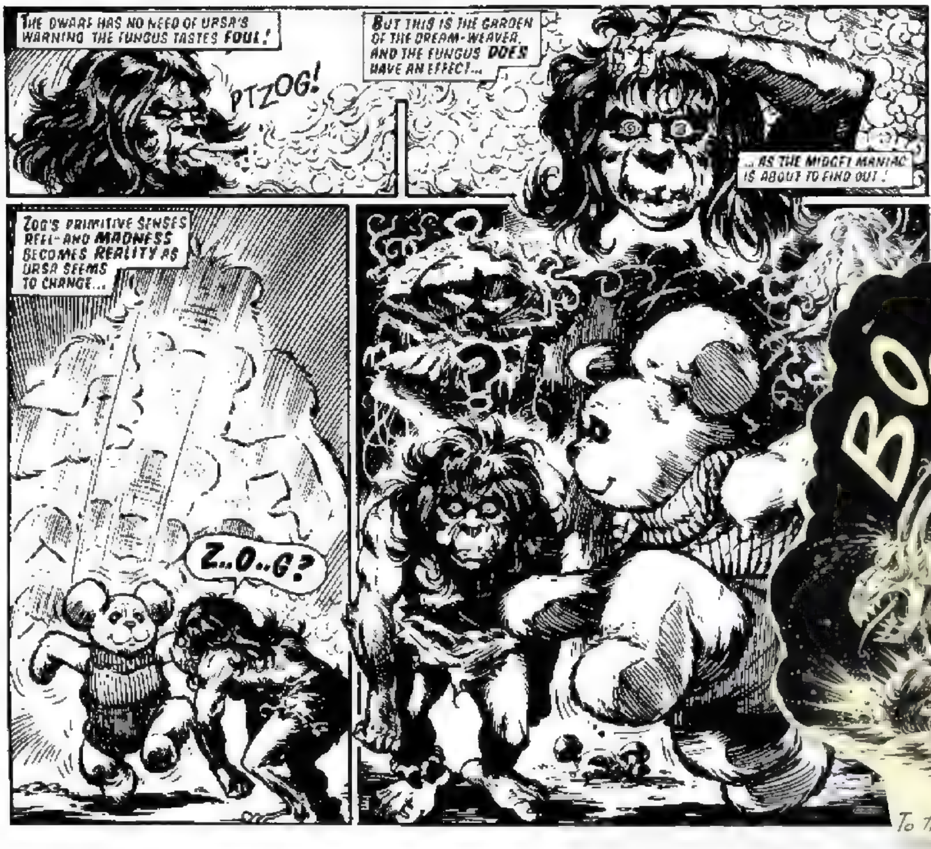
THE LIVING DEAD

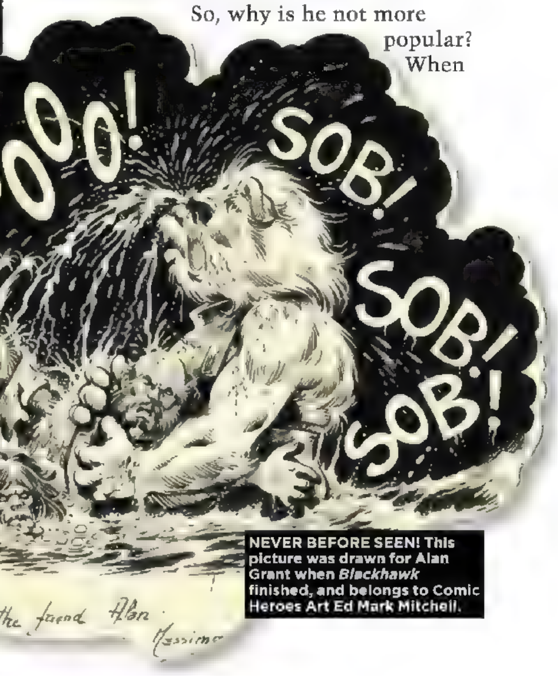
One particularly overlooked series is Peter Milligan's *The Dead* from 1987, in which Belardinelli's typically florid style took on a more unsettling edge. Humanity thinks it has conquered death, but terrifying demons start erupting from the bodies of the living and the 'hero', Fludd, is forced to travel to the world of the dead to save mankind. Belardinelli's psychedelic artwork began to verge on the horrific, as the nightmare of a world beyond our own revealed a deep undercurrent of the grotesque in his style, which had been hinted at but never truly revealed.

Translating scripts himself, Belardinelli averaged five finished pages a week but towards the end of the '80s his style began to look increasingly old fashioned and his final series was *Moon Runners*, which ran for a year in a handful of progs and specials, from 1988. A sophisticated story of boardroom dynastic struggles in the future, it unfortunately read like *Ace Trucking* without the humour, and the potential of the bizarre flights of fancy of *The Dead* were never realised as Belardinelli returned to his tamer, safer style.

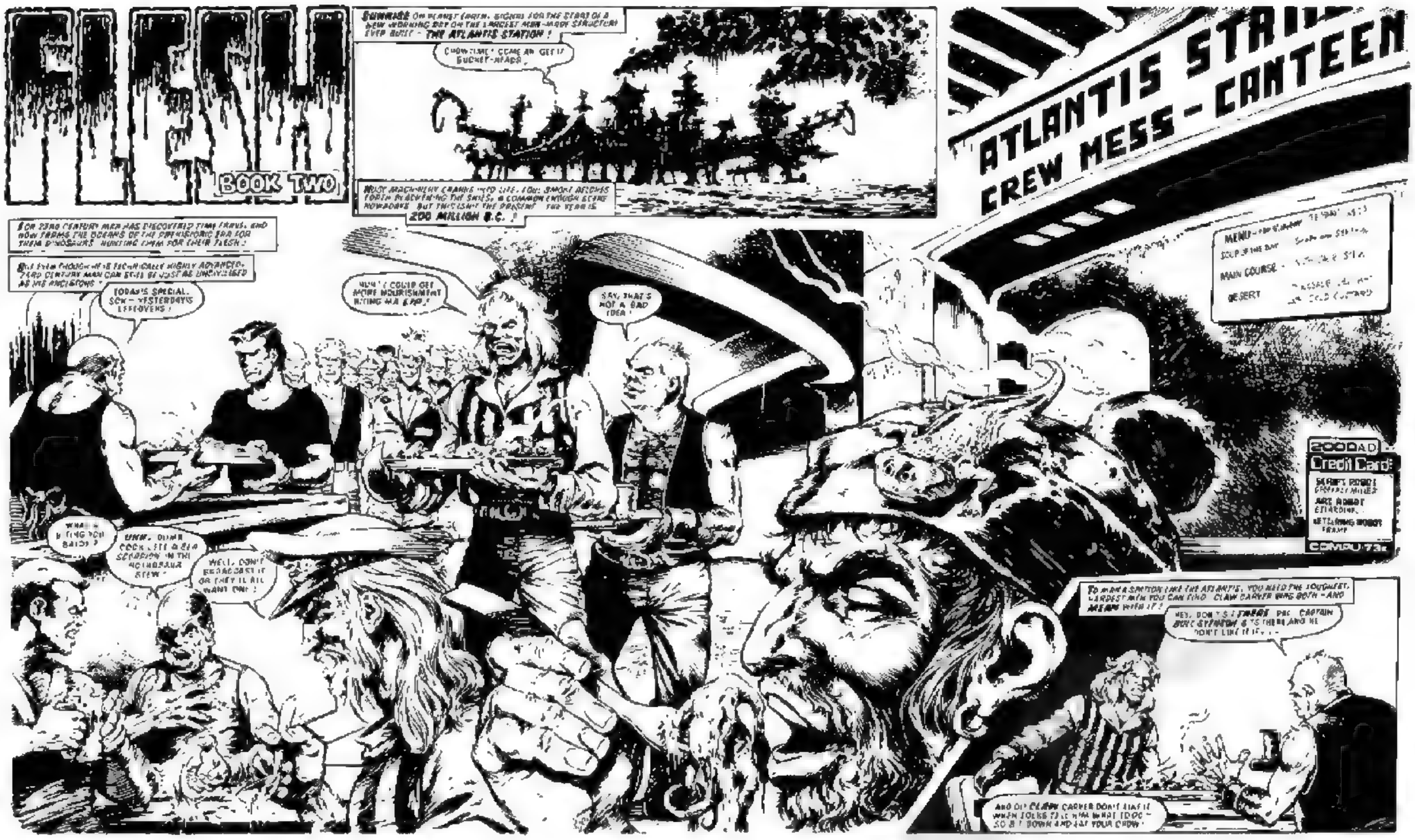
In the meantime, he had begun creating characters for a Disneyland-style project for a Singapore businessman. He spent years creating everything from monsters and wizards to to medieval horses. Sadly, the project folded and his work never saw the light of day, though one can only imagine what a Belardinelli-designed theme park would have looked like.

So, why is he not more popular? When


THE DWARF HAS NO NEED OF URSA'S WARNING. THE FUNGUS TASTES FOUL!
PTZOG!
BUT THIS IS THE GARDEN OF THE DREAM-WEAVER, AND THE FUNGUS DOES HAVE AN EFFECT...
...AS THE MIDGET MANIAC IS ABOUT TO FIND OUT!
ZOG'S PRIMITIVE SENSES REEL—AND MADNESS BECOMES REALITY AS URSA SEEMS TO CHANGE...
Z..O..G?


BOOOO!
SOB! SOB! SOB!
To the friend Alan
Massimo

NEVER BEFORE SEEN! This picture was drawn for Alan Grant when *Blackhawk* finished, and belongs to Comic Heroes Art Ed Mark Mitchell.


FLESH
BOOK TWO
THE ATLANTIS STATION!
200 MILLION B.C.
ATLANTIS STATION
CREW MESS - CANTEEN
TODAY'S SPECIAL. SOY - YESTERDAY'S LEFTOVERS!
SAY, THAT'S NOT A BAD IDEA!
2000AD Credit Card

the greats of *2000 AD*'s heyday are reeled off – Bolland, McMahon, Ezquerra, Gibbons, Kennedy – why is Belardinelli denied a place? *2000 AD* is no stranger to innovative or unique art but at times the Italian's work seems almost too European, even in a title with strong Continental artistic leanings. It can be beautiful, it can be savage, it can even by hard-edged, but above all else it was exciting. Belardinelli managed to produce distinctive, elegant artwork that broke the mold and created some of the most luscious artwork ever seen in British comics.

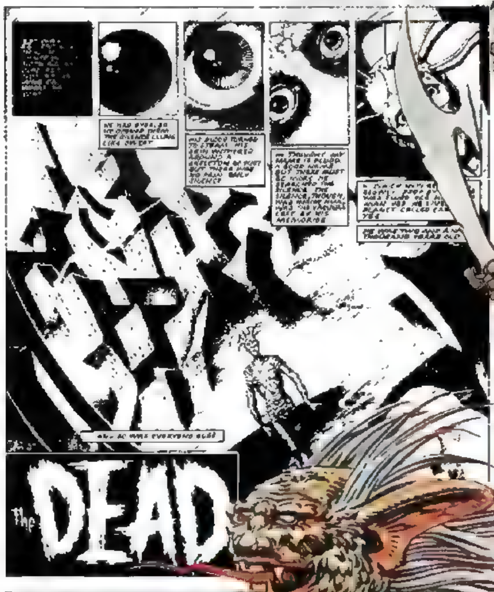
Speaking shortly after Belardinelli's death, Pat Mills said that he'd had 'the divine spark' but felt that perhaps he didn't fulfil his true potential.

"To be blunt, I think we failed Massimo on *2000 AD*," he said at the time. "I certainly did. I should have tried harder with him on *Sláine*… Instead, we gave him stories that were always popular with the readers, we played to his strengths, for example on *Ace Trucking*, but we never found him a serial and a way to develop that would ensure he had the lasting international recognition and security he truly deserved."

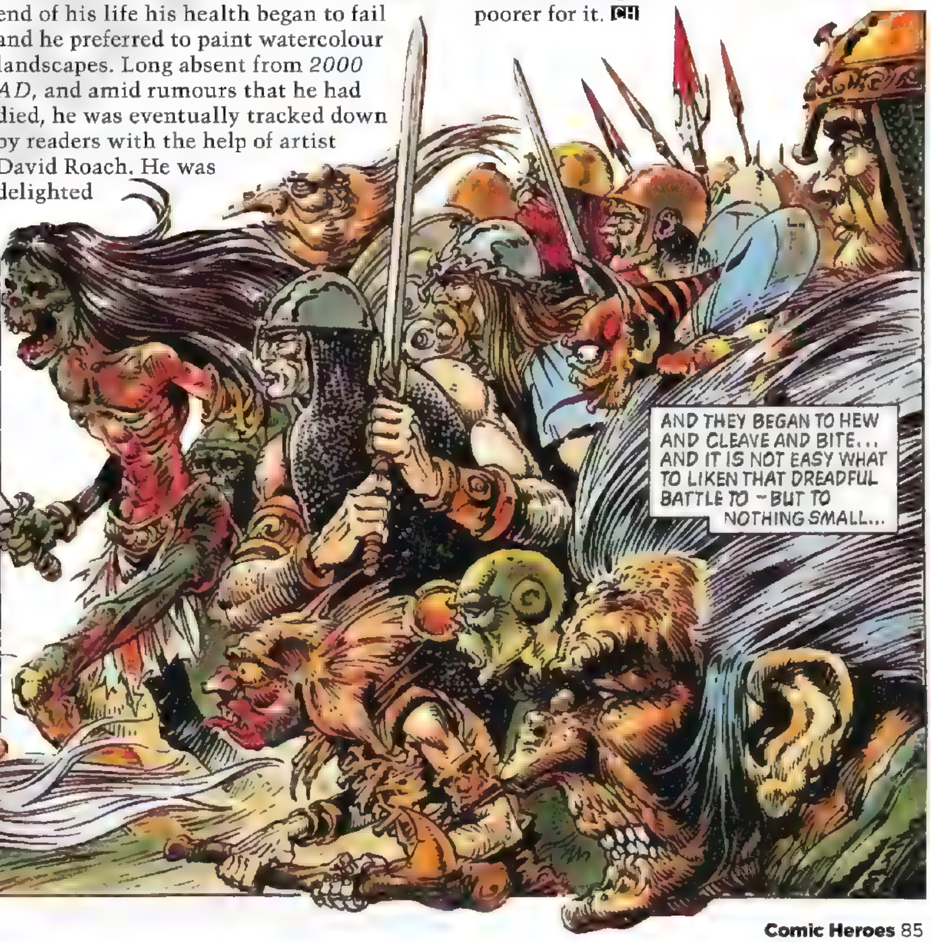
LASTING LEGACY

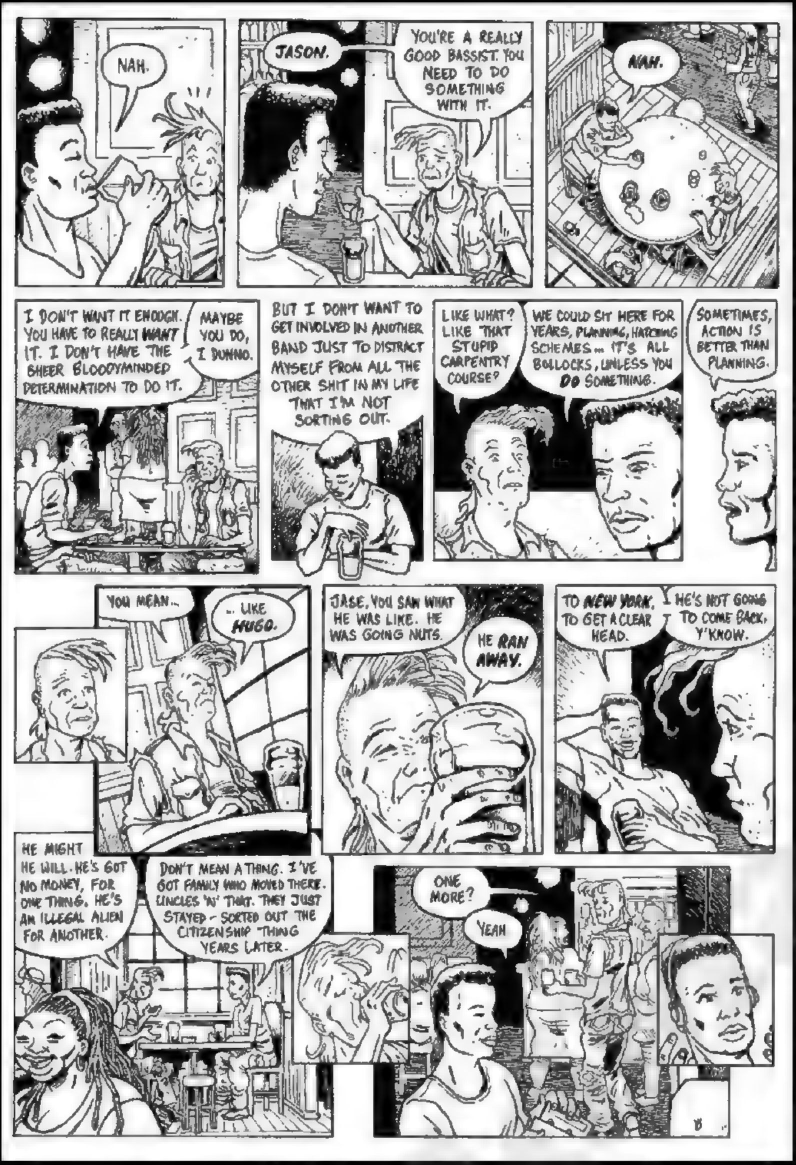
During his retirement, Massimo lived just outside Rome. He spent some time sculpting – his garden was adorned with his fantastical animals – but towards the end of his life his health began to fail and he preferred to paint watercolour landscapes. Long absent from *2000 AD*, and amid rumours that he had died, he was eventually tracked down by readers with the help of artist David Roach. He was delighted and humbled to discover that he was not only well remembered but still had a huge number of fans. His commissions from the time show that he had lost none of his flair and imagination, so it came as a great shock when he passed away.

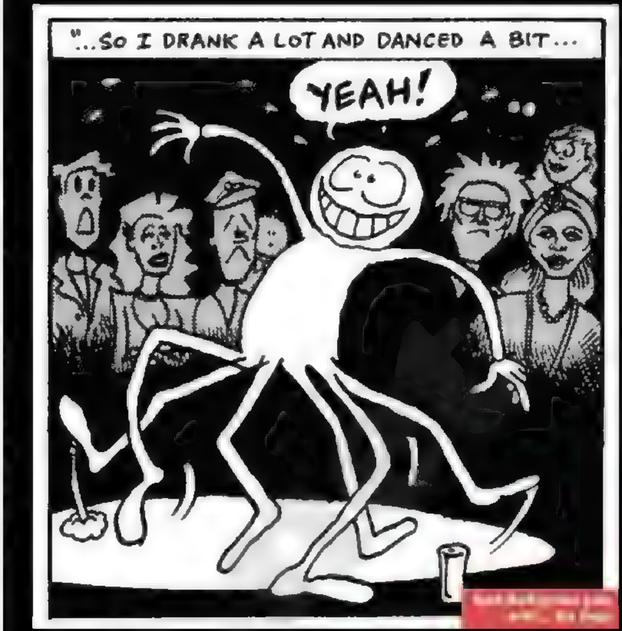
Massimo Belardinelli remains one of the giants of *2000 AD*. His beautiful, eccentric, even savage imagination was a stunning contrast to the work of his peers. In a world of increasingly commercialised art we may never see a unique talent like Belardinelli again. And comics will be poorer for it. CH

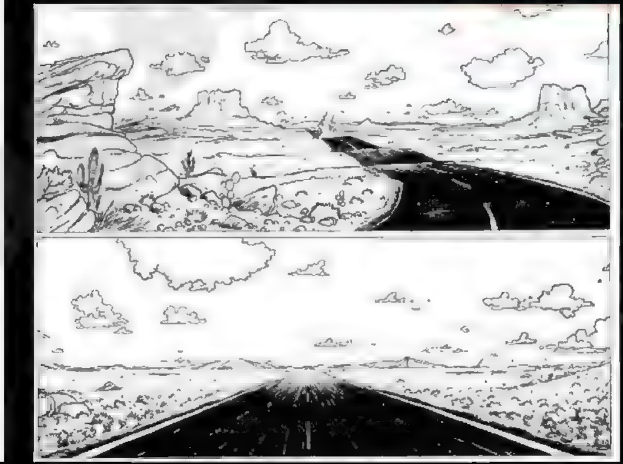


The Dead remains one of Belardinelli's most disturbing, horrific and complex works.


AND THEY BEGAN TO HEW AND CLEAVE AND BITE… AND IT IS NOT EASY WHAT TO LIKEN THAT DREADFUL BATTLE TO – BUT TO NOTHING SMALL…


NAH.
JASON.
YOU'RE A REALLY GOOD BASSIST. YOU NEED TO DO SOMETHING WITH IT.
NAH.
I DON'T WANT IT ENOUGH. YOU HAVE TO REALLY WANT IT. I DON'T HAVE THE SHEER BLOODYMINDED DETERMINATION TO DO IT.
MAYBE YOU DO, I DUNNO.
BUT I DON'T WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN ANOTHER BAND JUST TO DISTRACT MYSELF FROM ALL THE OTHER SHIT IN MY LIFE THAT I'M NOT SORTING OUT.
LIKE WHAT? LIKE THAT STUPID CARPENTRY COURSE?
WE COULD SIT HERE FOR YEARS, PLANNING, HATCHING SCHEMES... IT'S ALL BOLLOCKS, UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING.
SOMETIMES, ACTION IS BETTER THAN PLANNING.
YOU MEAN...
...LIKE HUGO.
JASE, YOU SAW WHAT HE WAS LIKE. HE WAS GOING NUTS.
HE RAN AWAY.
TO NEW YORK, TO GET A CLEAR HEAD.
HE'S NOT GOING TO COME BACK, Y'KNOW.
HE MIGHT. HE WILL. HE'S GOT NO MONEY, FOR ONE THING. HE'S AN ILLEGAL ALIEN FOR ANOTHER.
DON'T MEAN A THING. I'VE GOT FAMILY WHO MOVED THERE. UNCLES 'N' THAT. THEY JUST STAYED - SORTED OUT THE CITIZENSHIP THING YEARS LATER.
ONE MORE?
YEAH.


"...SO I DRANK A LOT AND DANCED A BIT...
YEAH!



TATE'S BACK

Matthew Badham talks to cartoonist Nick Abadzis about the long-overdue re-release of his cult comic strip *Hugo Tate*

The seminal magazine *Deadline* – which ran from 1988 until 1995 and combined cultural reportage and comic strip mayhem – was most notable for introducing the world to Tank Girl. But that feisty, munitions-obsessed riot grrrl was not the only memorable character to emerge from its pages. Others included future detective Johnny Nemo; party girls Pippa and Liz from *Wired World*; the neurotic Timulo; and Hugo Tate, whose eponymous exploits are being reprinted in May by British publisher Blank Slate Books.

"I created the *Hugo Tate* strip in 1985," says its author, Nick Abadzis, "but it wasn't published anywhere until launch editors Steve Dillon and Brett Ewins picked it up for *Deadline* in 1988."

Publication in that magazine was a creative baptism of fire for the cartoonist, who at that point thought he was better at writing than drawing. "I was fully aware of my artistic limitations but I tried to make a virtue of them. That's why the first strips use what I'd refer to as a 'stick figure' approach."

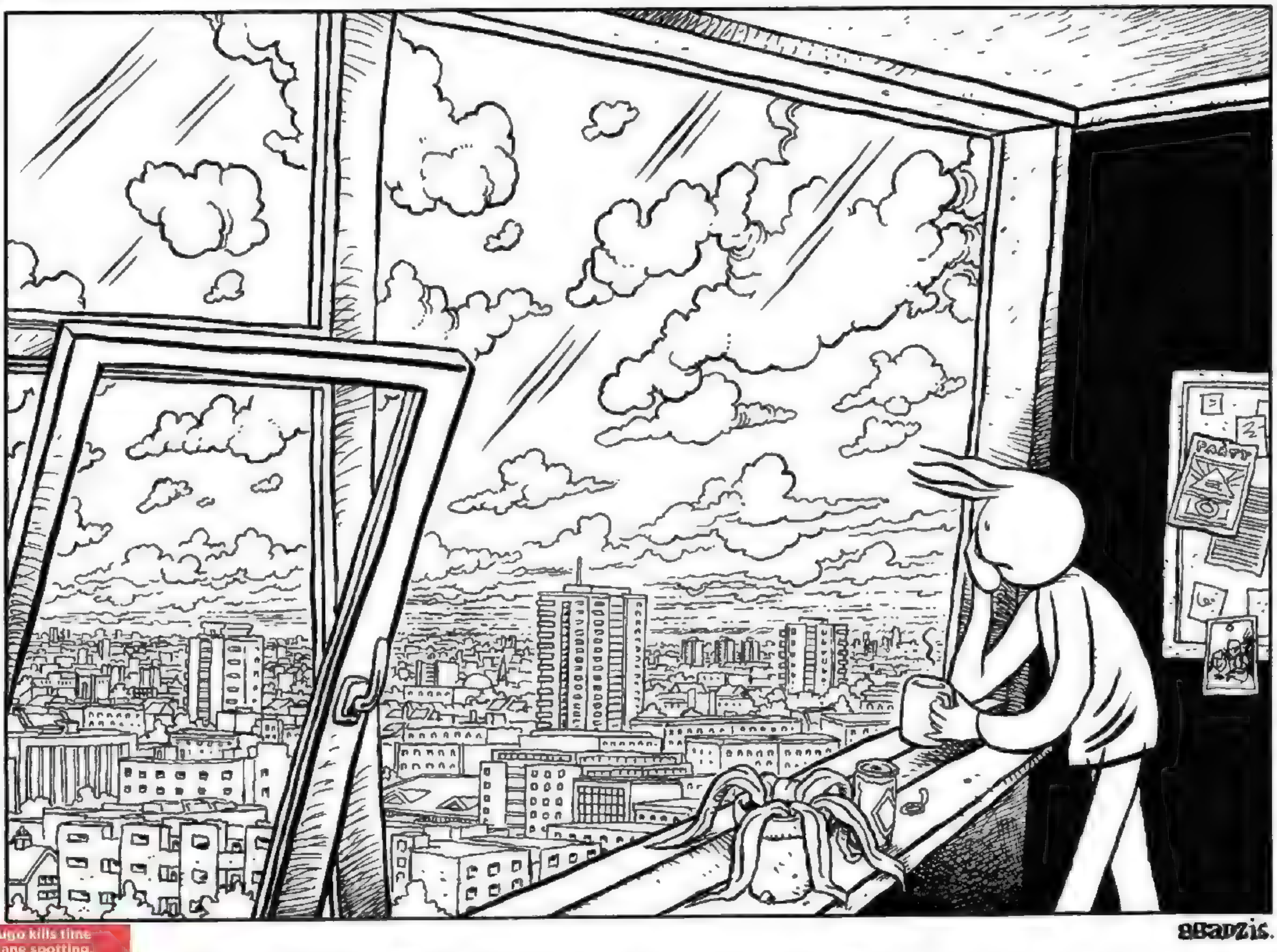
Those early, artistically minimalist efforts reflected Abadzis' experiences of living at the tail-end of the Thatcher years. They were simple vignettes about being young, broke and frustrated.

"Most of my friends were musicians or artists, so nobody had two beans to rub together. Our social life consisted mainly of going to the pub on a Friday and Saturday night to drink half-pints. And, if you were lucky, you could occasionally scrape together enough money to buy some records or comics, or go to the pictures."

Despite modest beginnings, *Hugo Tate* soon blossomed. As Garth Ennis notes, in his introduction to the new collection, "Hugo first appeared as a funny little stick man in a funny little stick world, doing what first appeared to be funny little stick things. It didn't take too long, however, to realise something more special was going on here."

As time went on, Abadzis' 'stick figure' vignettes gave way to more complex narratives, featuring a growing ensemble consisting mainly of Hugo's family and friends. Plus, the strip – which had started by focusing on the lead character's misanthropic outlook – broadened its perspective to tackle themes such as family dysfunction, alcohol

All images ©Nick Abadzis 2012



Hugo kills time plane spotting.

abuse and bereavement. In one early episode, 'Bread & Liver', Hugo goes to visit his father. While there, he asks about his parents' divorce and the reply he gets – that they "…just stopped being friends…" – is poignant, powerful and, above all, very real.

"I always strive for a sense of truth in everything that I do," Abadzis reveals. "The stories I enjoy most in any medium are those whose central tenets are true – where you recognise the emotions."

The cartoonist doesn't take sole credit for the strip's creative blossoming, however. "*Deadline* was a great proving ground for young creators. It was a place where you were encouraged to experiment and produce the best work that you could. I owe Steve Dillon in particular a lot for encouraging me to push my storytelling as far as possible."

Hugo Tate would soar to even greater creative heights with 'O, America', its second series. Hugo takes a trip across America in the company of Spoonhead, whose turbulent personal history provides a dramatic fulcrum for much of the action. This 'road movie on paper' plunged the strip into even darker territory, taking in issues such as gun culture, celebrity, violent criminality and drug use and abuse. Hugo was pushed to his mental limit.

"I didn't have a lot of life experience at that point, but one thing I could definitely write about was being in the kind of places that Hugo goes to mentally in 'O, America'. I've been diagnosed with clinical depression on a few occasions, although it's a very long time since I had a really bad episode. I never liked the idea of taking medication, and so I did some therapy and sorted my own strategies for dealing with that tendency in my personality."

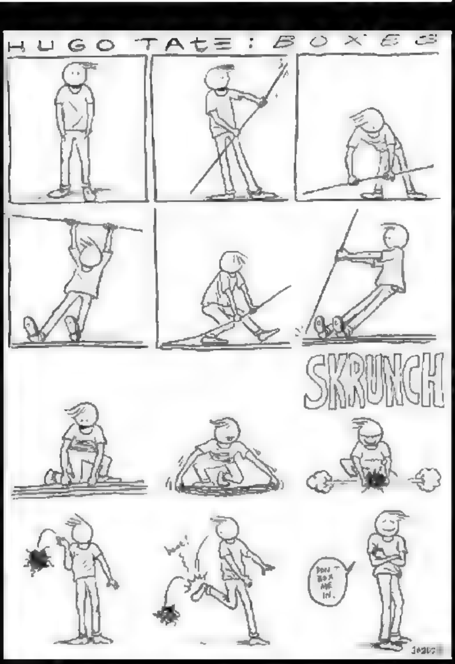
There was to have been a third series of the strip for *Deadline*, but that never happened.

"Recently, I wrote some stories for another project that I showed to my wife, and she said that they were very like *Hugo Tate* in terms of their tone. Looking back, I think that may have been a problem – I didn't want to write another story about Hugo just because it was expected. I prefer it when ideas emerge organically, as my more recent ones have. So, it's possible that Hugo might appear again in my work, perhaps even as a supporting character, but I don't want to force it."

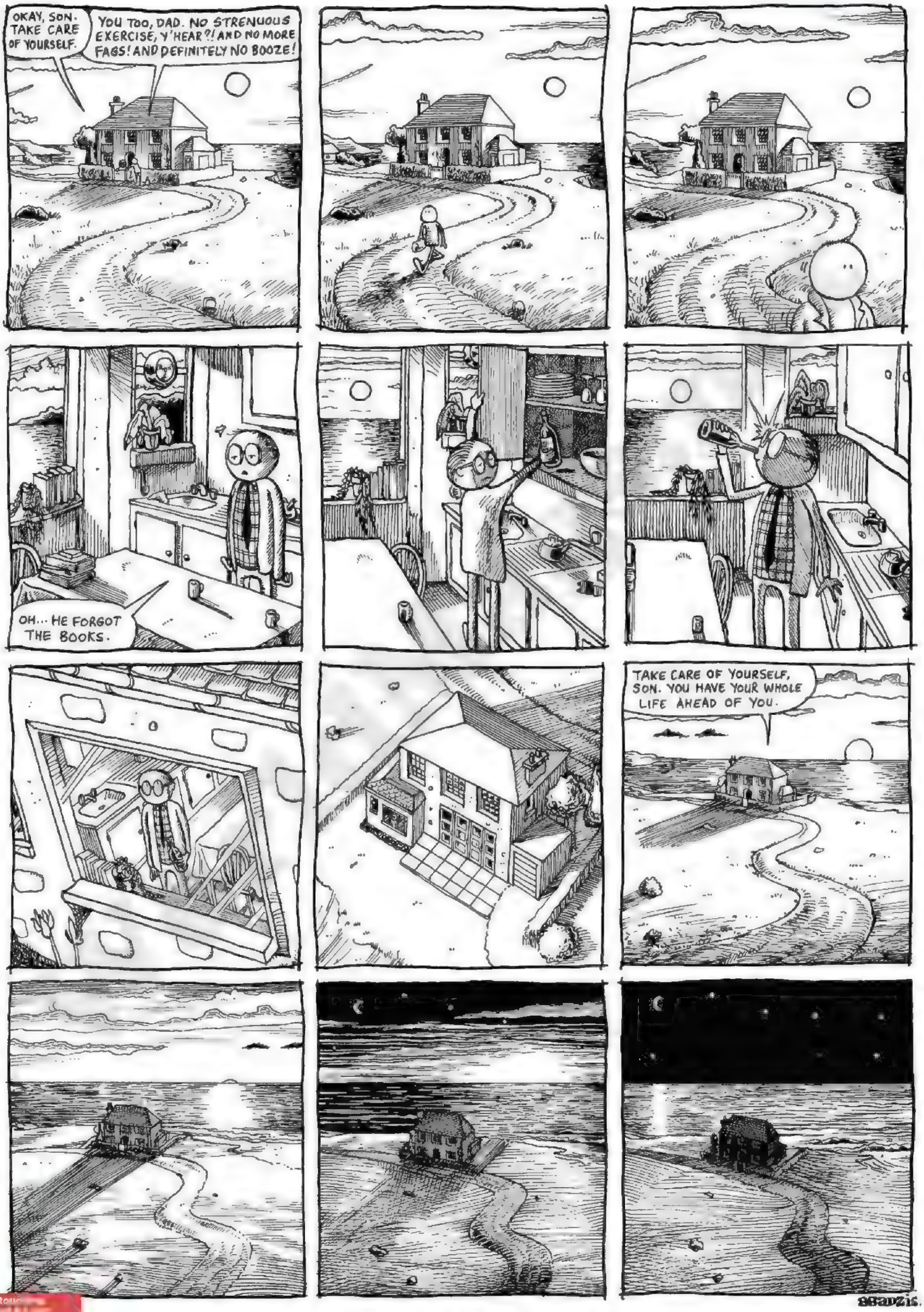
ROCKET DOG

Meanwhile, in lieu of new stories, there's the forthcoming collection. "There's long been a desire to see the strips reprinted. Over the past few years, I've had a growing number of emails from people asking me if there was ever going to be a *Hugo Tate* collection. Part of me wonders if that's down to the success of my graphic novel, *Laika*, which is about the dog sent into space by the Russians in 1957 aboard Sputnik II. Somehow, it seemed to penetrate the popular consciousness and so I wonder if it made readers curious about my other work."

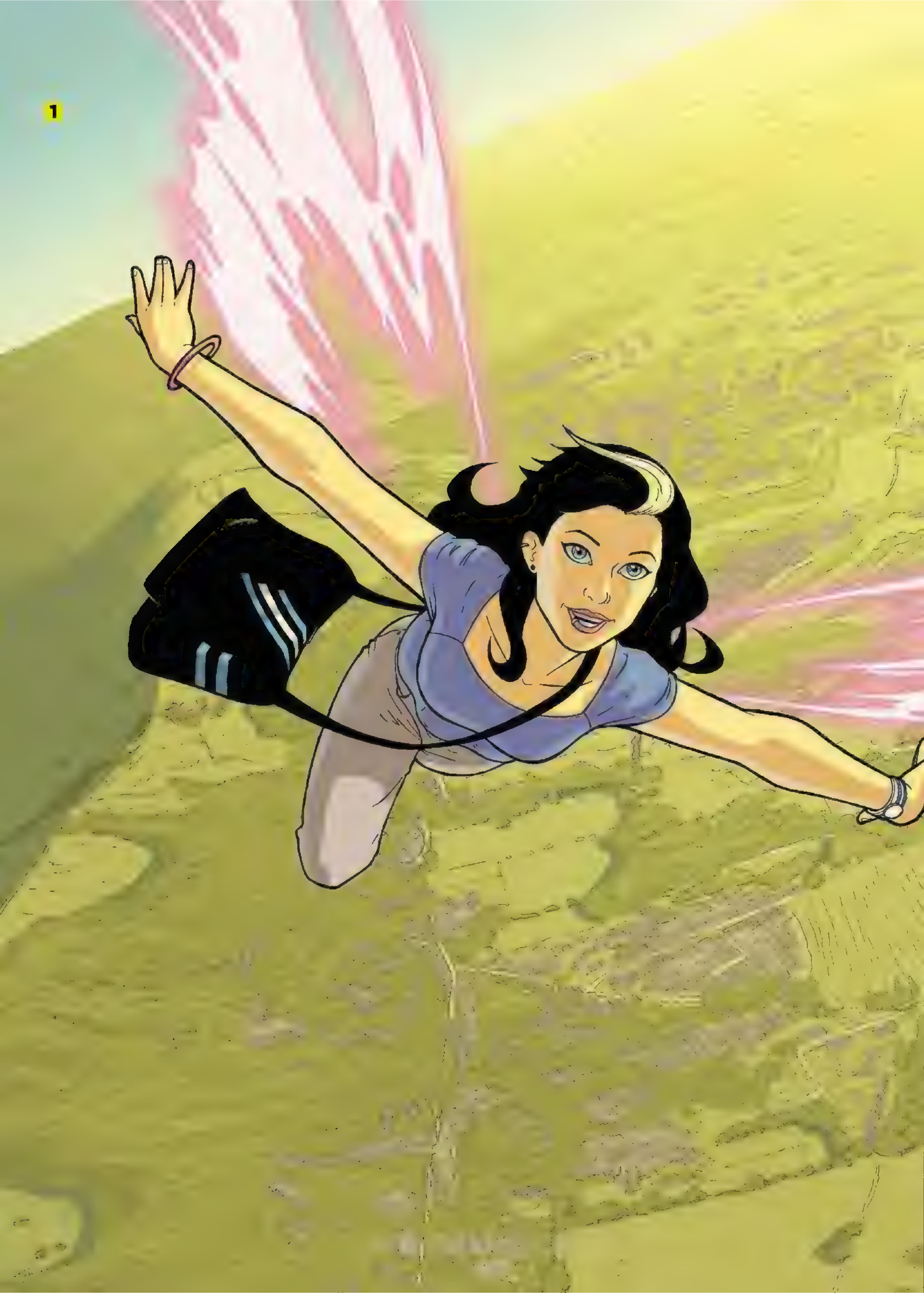
Abadzis has had an impressive career in comics but *Hugo Tate* retains a special place in his heart and he's pleased that it will be available again for readers to enjoy.



"I was learning in public when I worked at *Deadline*, so I didn't know what to expect when I pulled out all the original artwork in preparation for this new collection. But I'm a very different person now, which gave me distance and a certain amount of objectivity. I could read the strips as though they were by someone else and, although they aren't perfect, I think they stand up well." CH


OKAY, SON. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.
YOU TOO, DAD. NO STRENUOUS EXERCISE, Y'HEAR?! AND NO MORE FAGS! AND DEFINITELY NO BOOZE!
OH... HE FORGOT THE BOOKS.
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, SON. YOU HAVE YOUR WHOLE LIFE AHEAD OF YOU.
ABADZIS.

The tou[illegible]
[illegible]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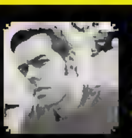
Artist Profile



INFO
Clean lines and expressive characters; the new Steve Dillon.
LOCATION
London
WEBSITE
www.jamiemckelvie.com

THE ART OF...

Jamie McKelvie

He co-created *Phonogram* and has just finished *X-Men: Season One*. Stephen Jewell profiles one of comics' brightest rising stars

Ever since he picked up a collection of their early '80s adventures as a teenager, the X-Men have been a constant presence in Jamie McKelvie's comic book experiences. Now, two decades later, the London-born, Malvern-raised artist has just put the finishing touches to next month's *X-Men: Season One*, a Dennis Hopeless-written hardcover graphic novel that explores the early days of the Merry Mutants' original incarnation. Having risen to prominence co-creating 2005's indie music-fuelled *Phonogram* and its 2008 sequel *The Singles Club* with *Uncanny X-Men* scribe Kieron Gillen, and writing and drawing 2007's *Suburban Glamour* for Image Comics, *Season One* represents the 32-year-old's most significant Marvel assignment to date.

COMIC HEROES: What were the first comic books that you remember reading?
JAMIE MCKELVIE: I read *Transformers*, just like everybody else, and *2000 AD* – a bit earlier than I should have done! My elder cousin who shared a room with me would buy it, so I was reading stuff like *Zenith* and *Nemesis* when I was about six or seven. I stopped reading comics when I was about 13 and didn't read anything at all until I was 21, when my girlfriend of the time introduced me to *The Sandman*. I was at university in Nottingham, the home of Page 45, one of the best comic shops in the country. They guided me through *The Sandman* books and it went from there.

CH: You studied sociology and you've never had any formal art training...
JM: I just began doing it in my spare time. I started out pretty late compared to most people. The thing that really sparked my interest was Marc Hempel's art on *The Kindly Ones* (*The Sandman Vol 9*), which made me realise that the artwork didn't have to be the way I thought it should be. You could have a more graphic style and clean lines. It wasn't that mainstream styles didn't appeal to me; I just couldn't draw like that. I tried it early on with crosshatching and all that but it looked terrible. I thought, 'I can't do that so I'll try something else'.

CH: You first met Kieron Gillen at the Bristol Comics Expo in 2003.
JM: He said, 'I've got this comic called *Phonogram* that I want you to draw'. I'd already done a short story for the Image anthology, *Four Letter Worlds*, with my friend Amber Benson, and *Long Hot Summer*, a graphic novel about '80s mods in LA with Eric Stephenson, who is now Image's publisher. I got to know Image quite well, so when we came to pitching *Phonogram*, they were quite open to the idea – Eric loves British music anyway, so it was quite an easy sell.

CH: Did you and Kieron have an equal creative partnership on *Phonogram*?
JM: Weirdly, a lot of people assume that we both have the same music tastes but we don't really. The way I look at it is that the story is his to tell and I then interpret it and turn it into something that people can read and understand. It was very equal in terms of how the comics were done – we were constantly collaborating and always on Instant Messenger while we were doing the pages, tossing ideas back and forth and discussing things.

CH: How did writing and drawing *Suburban Glamour* compare to working with Kieron and other writers, such as Matt Fraction?
JM: *Suburban Glamour* was a much more organic process in that I was constantly adapting it as I went along. I wrote a script first but, as I went along, if I saw a better way of doing something then I could adjust the artwork or the dialogue. I wouldn't necessarily say it's a better way of working but it's different. Kieron and Matt Fraction were both members of the Warren Ellis Forum and have similar, conversational scripting styles. I don't know where they picked it up from but Kieron learned

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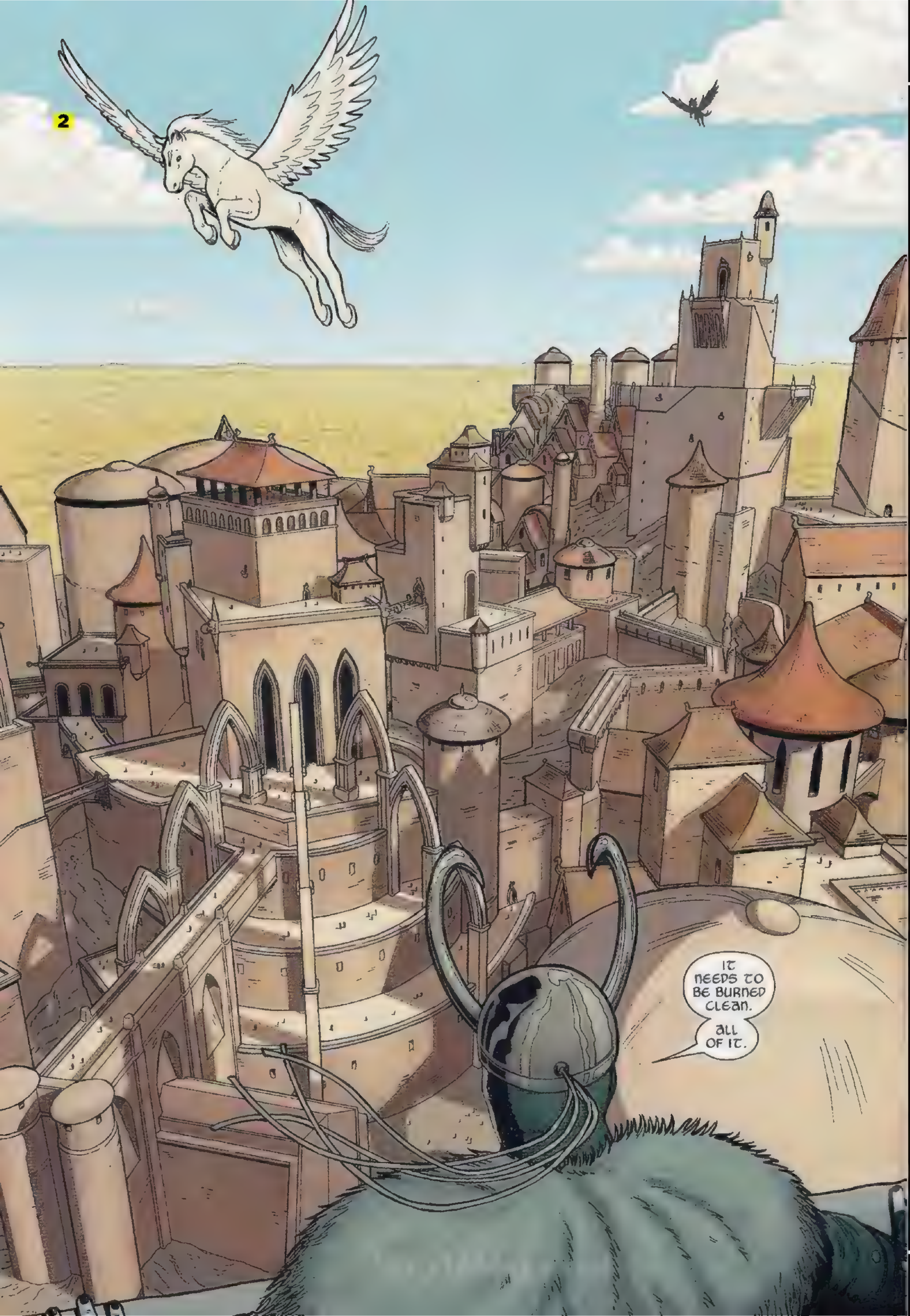
McKelvie Gallery

1 Suburban Glamour

It was the first thing that I ever wrote so I can see all its flaws but I'm so proud of it. I can't wait to start on the second series as I'd always planned to do a few volumes. It's quite personal as well because I used a lot of my own experiences growing up. The place where it's set is a very thinly-veiled version of Malvern, but with a different name, so there's a fair bit of autobiography in it.

2 Siege: Loki

That was a turning point for both Kieron and myself. The need for the issue spun out of this big event but it was the starting point towards Kieron doing *Journey Into Mystery*. It also brought me to the attention of a lot of people who hadn't seen my work before. I remember drawing the full-page Asgard scene, which took me three days to draw, but it was worth it.
(Pictured overleaf)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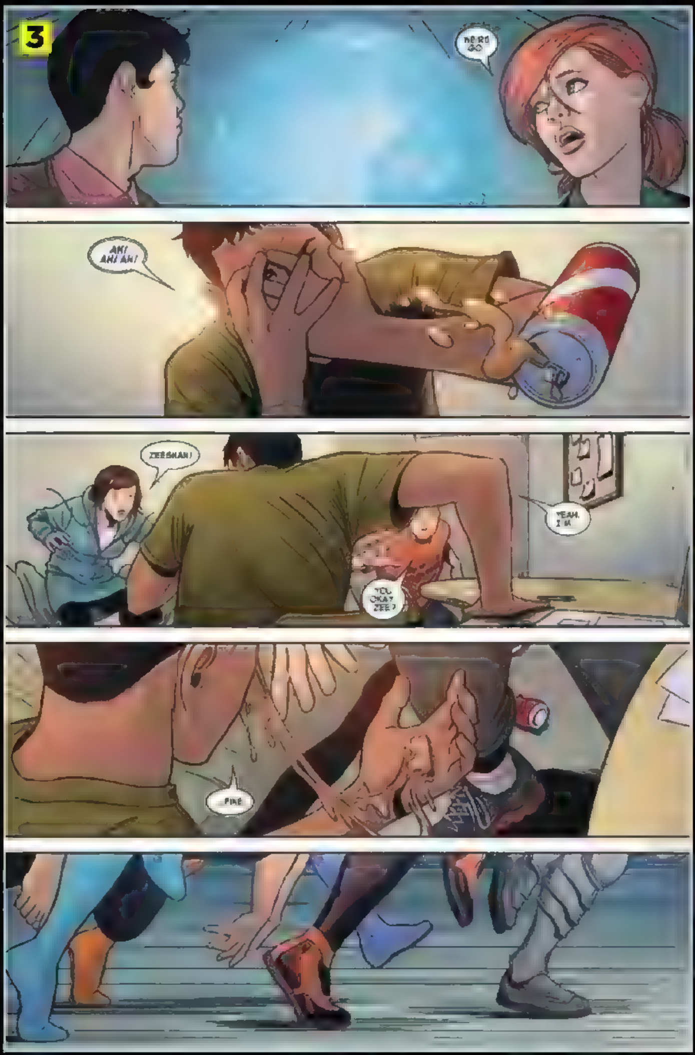
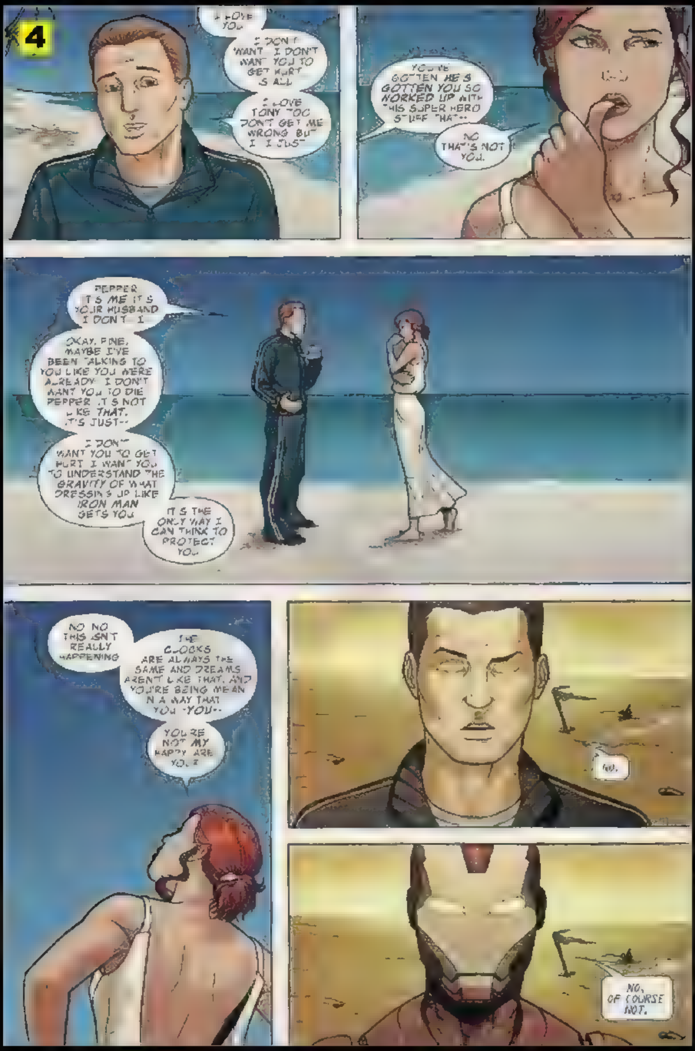
IT NEEDS TO BE BURNED CLEAN.
ALL OF IT.


3
HERE GO
AH! AH! AH!
ZEESHAN!
YEAH, I'M
YOU OKAY ZEE?
...FINE


4
I LOVE YOU
I DON'T WANT I DON'T WANT YOU TO GET HURT 'S ALL
I LOVE TONY TOO DON'T GET ME WRONG BUT I I JUST
YOU'VE GOTTEN HE'S GOTTEN YOU SO WORKED UP WITH THIS SUPER HERO STUFF THAT--
NO THAT'S NOT YOU.
PEPPER IT'S ME IT'S YOUR HUSBAND I DON'T I
OKAY, FINE, MAYBE I'VE BEEN TALKING TO YOU LIKE YOU WERE ALREADY I DON'T WANT YOU TO DIE PEPPER IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. IT'S JUST--
I DON'T WANT YOU TO GET HURT I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND THE GRAVITY OF WHAT DRESSING UP LIKE IRON MAN GETS YOU
IT'S THE ONLY WAY I CAN THINK TO PROTECT YOU
NO NO THIS ISN'T REALLY HAPPENING
THE CLOCKS ARE ALWAYS THE SAME AND DREAMS AREN'T LIKE THAT. AND YOU'RE BEING MEAN IN A WAY THAT YOU -YOU--
YOU'RE NOT MY HAPPY ARE YOU?
NO.
NO, OF COURSE NOT.

from the Alan Moore school, so he writes very long scripts. I joke that the script for *Singles Club #1* was 32 pages for a 16-page comic. He says he spends so much time on a script because he wants to be sure that the page is going to work. Warren Ellis is a lot more direct and precise, as he's been doing it for a lot longer. Dennis Hopeless' scripts are also conversational and very direct but not as lengthy as Kieron's. It's all been good and I've not had a bad script yet. I've been very lucky.

CH: Do you enjoy mainstream superheroes as much as independent, more personal stories?
JM: I like doing both, which is one of the great things about comics. You're not limited by budget so you can do anything – from drawing people in a nightclub to drawing people flying through space.

CH: What was the first thing you did for Marvel?
JM: It was an eight-page story in the *X-Men: Divided We Stand* anthology in 2008. They asked me who my favourite X-Man was and I said Nightcrawler or Rachel Summers. We couldn't use Rachel Summers because she was away in space at the time so they gave me a Nightcrawler story by Matt Fraction.

CH: Are you a big X-Men fan?
JM: They're my favourite Marvel characters. The first graphic novel I ever bought, when I was about 12, was the *Uncanny X-men: From The Ashes* trade, which was the Madelyne Pryor story with artwork by Paul Smith, who is one of my favourite artists and a massive influence on me. I then started buying the monthly issues and it was the Jim Lee era so I bought *X-Men #1* when it came out. Then when I started reading comics again a few years later, I bought Grant Morrison's *New X-Men*.

CH: How do you juggle maintaining the spirit of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's original X-Men with updating the characters for the 21st century for *Season One*?
JM: It's being treated as being in continuity but at the same time we have to modernise it and make it accessible to new readers, so it's a bit of a balance. My argument is that the original costumes worked in the '60s but if you put them in a modern context, they look like people dressed as '60s superheroes, so we've tweaked them a bit. There were some things that didn't need changing like Magneto, who's got a great costume that pretty much works as it is. I also found, not just in '60s comics but '60s media in general, that teenagers were kind of a new concept back then, so they all pretty much dressed like adults, so that needed tweaking as well. Audiences are a lot more sophisticated nowadays and a lot of things that you might have done back then won't work in a modern comic. You have to find a way to update it while staying true to the original story.

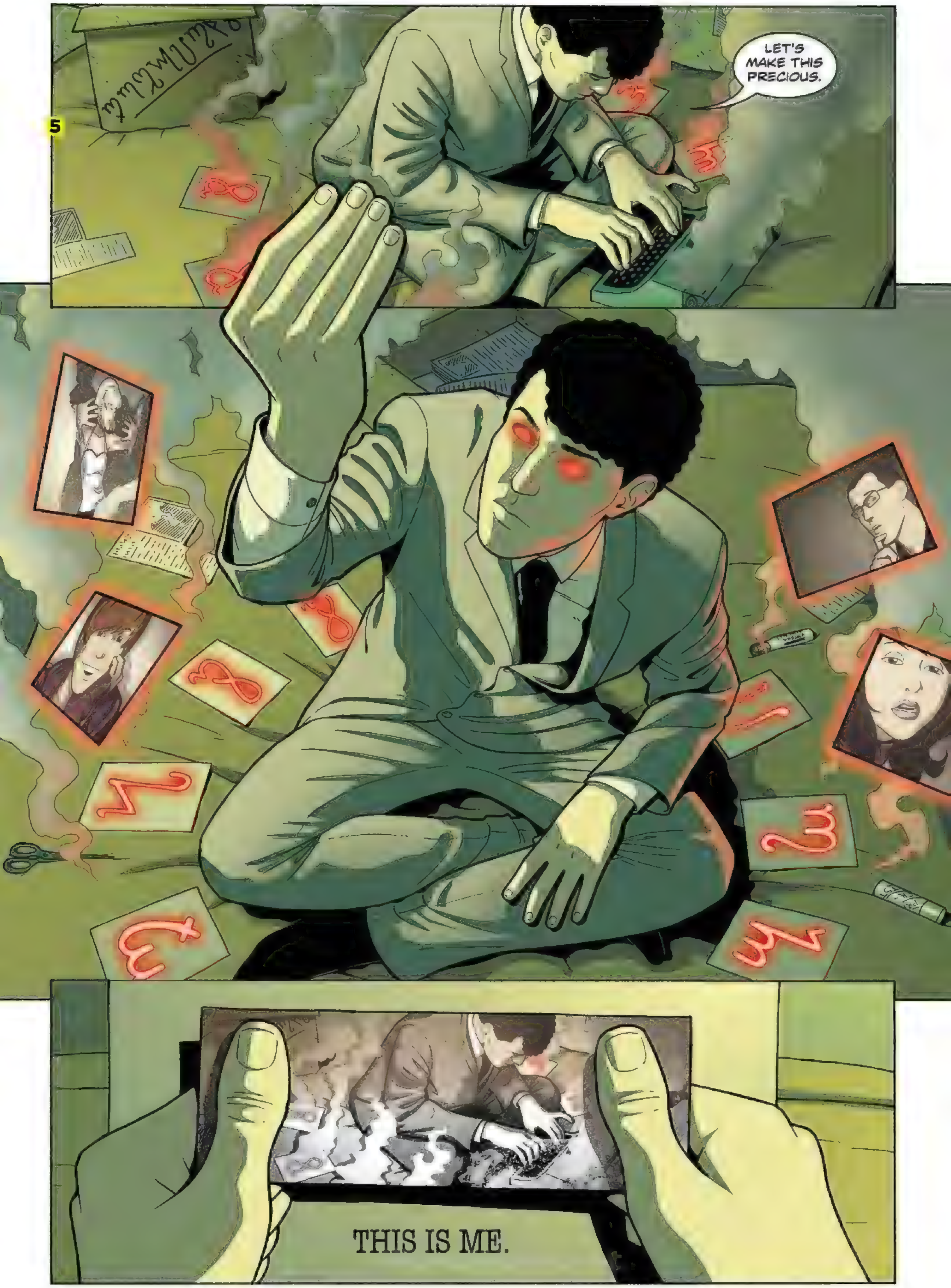
McKelvie Gallery

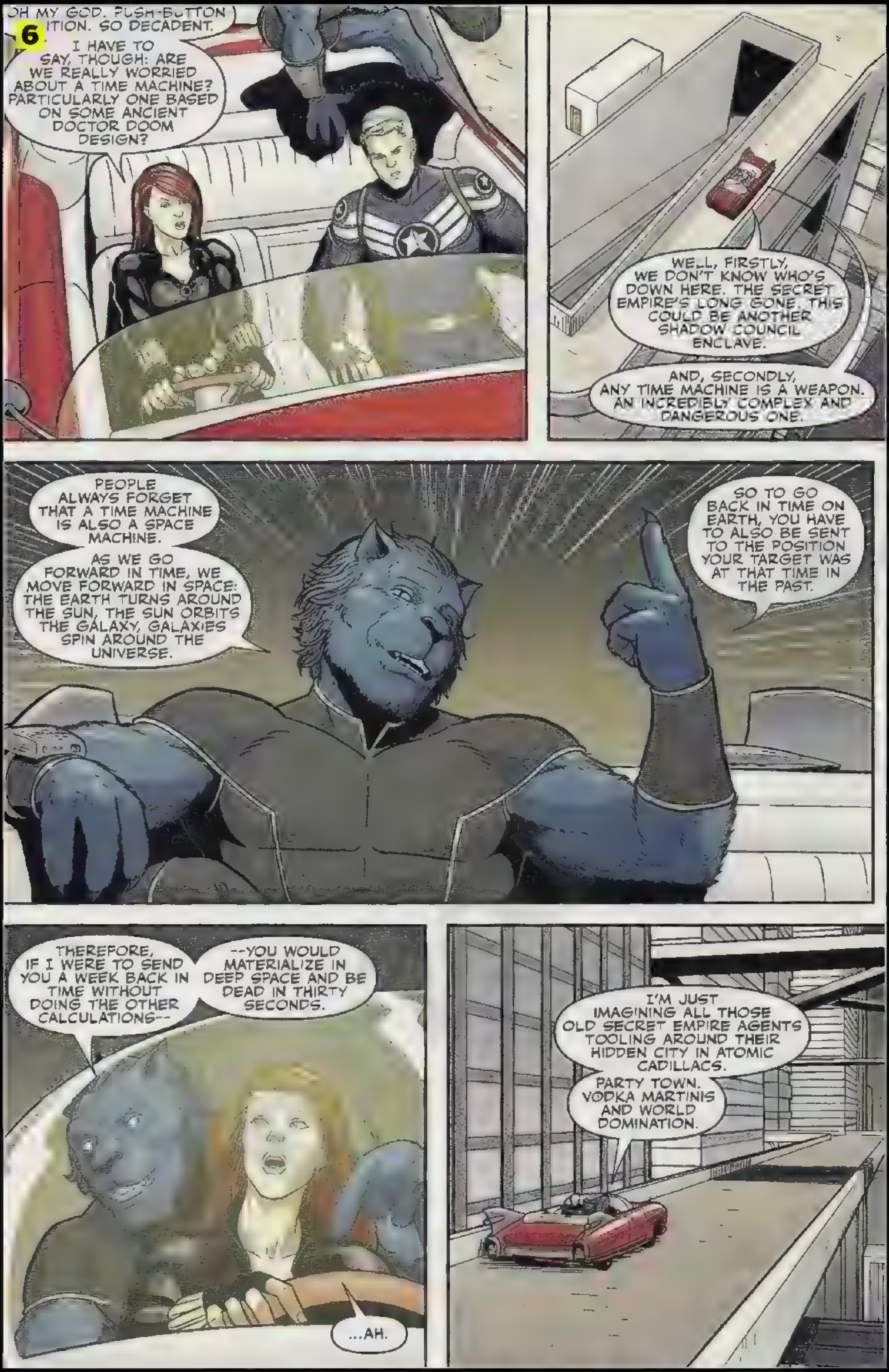
3 Generation Hope #9

The story was about suicide, so I wouldn't say that it was fun to work on. Kieron and I both put a lot of ourselves into what we do, so it was quite a draining comic – but a very important one as well.

4 Incredible Iron Man #32-33

They were only two eight-page back-ups but I had a lot of fun working on them with Fraction, especially the second, which was a silent story. I really liked doing that because you have to rely on your own ability and not the dialogue – you're seeing the world as Tony Stark sees it with a lot of overlays and augmented reality stuff. I worked on it with my girlfriend, Hannah Donovan, a product designer whose day-to-day job is designing interfaces.


LET'S MAKE THIS PRECIOUS.
THIS IS ME.


6
OH MY GOD. PUSH-BUTTON ITION. SO DECADENT.
I HAVE TO SAY, THOUGH: ARE WE REALLY WORRIED ABOUT A TIME MACHINE? PARTICULARLY ONE BASED ON SOME ANCIENT DOCTOR DOOM DESIGN?
WELL, FIRSTLY, WE DON'T KNOW WHO'S DOWN HERE. THE SECRET EMPIRE'S LONG GONE. THIS COULD BE ANOTHER SHADOW COUNCIL ENCLAVE.
AND, SECONDLY, ANY TIME MACHINE IS A WEAPON. AN INCREDIBLY COMPLEX AND DANGEROUS ONE.
PEOPLE ALWAYS FORGET THAT A TIME MACHINE IS ALSO A SPACE MACHINE.
AS WE GO FORWARD IN TIME, WE MOVE FORWARD IN SPACE: THE EARTH TURNS AROUND THE SUN, THE SUN ORBITS THE GALAXY, GALAXIES SPIN AROUND THE UNIVERSE.
SO TO GO BACK IN TIME ON EARTH, YOU HAVE TO ALSO BE SENT TO THE POSITION YOUR TARGET WAS AT THAT TIME IN THE PAST.
THEREFORE, IF I WERE TO SEND YOU A WEEK BACK IN TIME WITHOUT DOING THE OTHER CALCULATIONS--
--YOU WOULD MATERIALIZE IN DEEP SPACE AND BE DEAD IN THIRTY SECONDS.
...AH.
I'M JUST IMAGINING ALL THOSE OLD SECRET EMPIRE AGENTS TOOLING AROUND THEIR HIDDEN CITY IN ATOMIC CADILLACS.
PARTY TOWN. VODKA MARTINIS AND WORLD DOMINATION.

McKelvie Gallery

5 Phonogram: Singles Club

This was interesting because the whole story took place over three to four hours in the same room but was told from different perspectives in particular issues. I had to plan the room out from the beginning, marking everyone's position and how they moved around during the night. I had to work out everything from the lighting to where the background characters were. Halfway through the series, I cut up all the comics and stuck the pages up on my wall in chronological order so I could see what I was drawing, which drove me a bit crazy.

6 Secret Avengers #16

I'm known as somebody who can draw expressions and emotions, which I take a lot of pride in, but it leads to me getting a lot of gigs, where people are just talking. I wanted to show the other side of what I can do – the action stuff – and working with Warren was a great way of doing that as it's pretty much just one long action scene. It was such a fun project to research as it was based on a '50s scientist's idea of a futuristic city so I looked at a lot of '50s sci-fi, including an old World's Fair that Disney produced a lot of artwork for.

CH: Have you been inspired by Jack Kirby?

JM: I read a lot of the original comics and used a lot of his designs as springboards. People always draw comparisons – they used to say that they could see a Steve Dillon influence as well. I hadn't read a lot of his stuff at the time, but I have now and I guess we have quite similar styles.

CH: Last year's *X-Men: First Class* film covered similar territory to *Season One*...

JM: If you talk about the X-Men with people who haven't read the comics, the first thing they'll think about is *First Class* because that's the most recent film. I went through a lot of different costume designs and some of the early ones were definitely influenced by *First Class*, as you want it to look like the X-Men that people know. As it turned out, though, we decided to bring it a little bit closer to the original, so it's a kind of mix between the movie stuff and the Kirby stuff. CH

O Death, Where is Thy Sting?

All fiction finds drama in death, but no medium is in love with the dear departed quite like American comics – especially since they have so very many ways to bring our loved ones back... By **Matt Bielby**

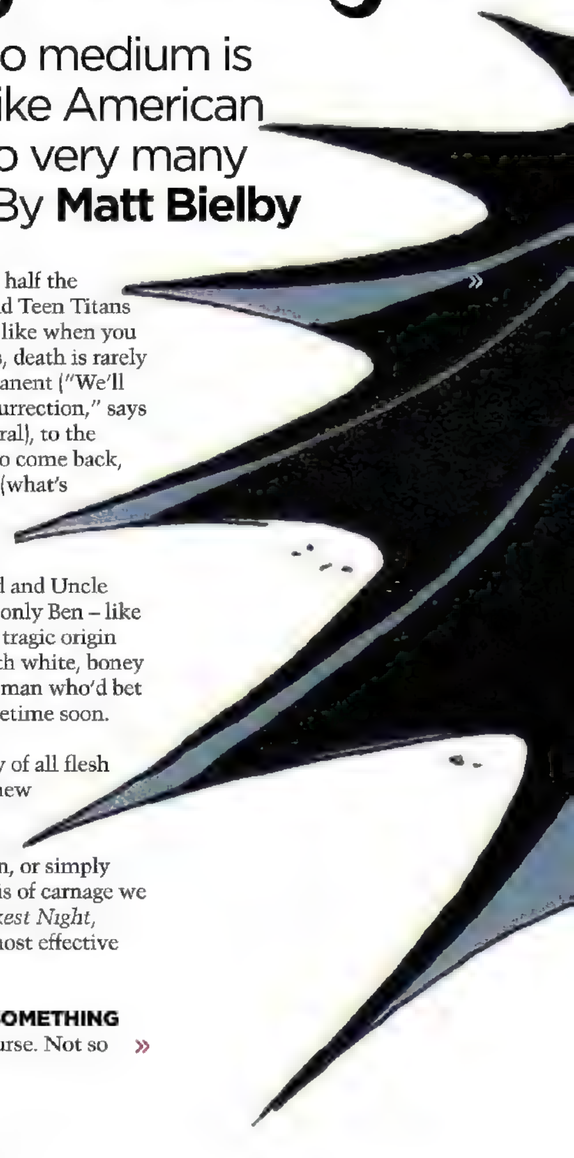
Comics didn't invent the dramatic possibilities of death and resurrection – Sherlock Holmes returned in 1903, 10 years after his apparent departure at the Reichenbach Falls; Bobby Ewing popped up in Pam's shower, invalidating the entire 1985-6 season of Dallas; indeed, you might be able to think of some even *more* culturally resonant precedents.

But they've sure milked it.

Every year now, some major figure will pop his clogs, or come back from the grave – over the last 12 months, for instance, Thor, the Human Torch, Baron Strucker, Mystique and the original Green Lantern all copped it, while the Vision, Black Bolt and Swamp Thing came back; in 2010 it was Nightcrawler, Red Skull, Sentry and Doc Samson who died, while Batman, Hawkman, Aquaman, Strontium Dog and Martian Manhunter rejoined us; in 2009 we lost Darkseid and Johnny Quick, while Captain America and the Punisher made 'surprise' reappearances. And this is just a smattering of the headline acts.

So how did such grisly, repetitive subject matter become a mainstay of the comic writer's storytelling armoury, to the point where 'comic book death' has become a standing joke? We know now that when a major character lays down their life – most of the Fantastic Four have done it, half the Avengers, the bulk of X-Men and Teen Titans and almost all the JLA – it ain't like when you or I pop our clogs. In the comics, death is rarely regarded as meaningful or permanent ("We'll all miss him. And pray for a resurrection," says Superman at J'onn J'onzz's funeral), to the point where if you die and *fail* to come back, you're just not trying very hard (what's keeping you, Janet Van Dyne?).

Wry fanboys once said the only people who stay dead in comics are Bucky, Jason Todd and Uncle Ben; ah, innocent times! Today only Ben – like Batman's parents, essential to a tragic origin story – clings to the afterlife with white, boney fingers, and it would be a brave man who'd bet against even his comeback sometime soon. The problem is, whether it's a minor character going the way of all flesh to demonstrate how bad some new villain is, an attention-grabbing tactic to reignite interest in one of the medium's elder statesmen, or simply one of those dispiriting tsunamis of carnage we get in epic crossovers like *Blackest Night*, death sells – it's the cheapest, most effective trick in comics.



Batman Image © DC Comics

THE DEATHS THAT MEANT SOMETHING

It wasn't always like this, of course. Not so

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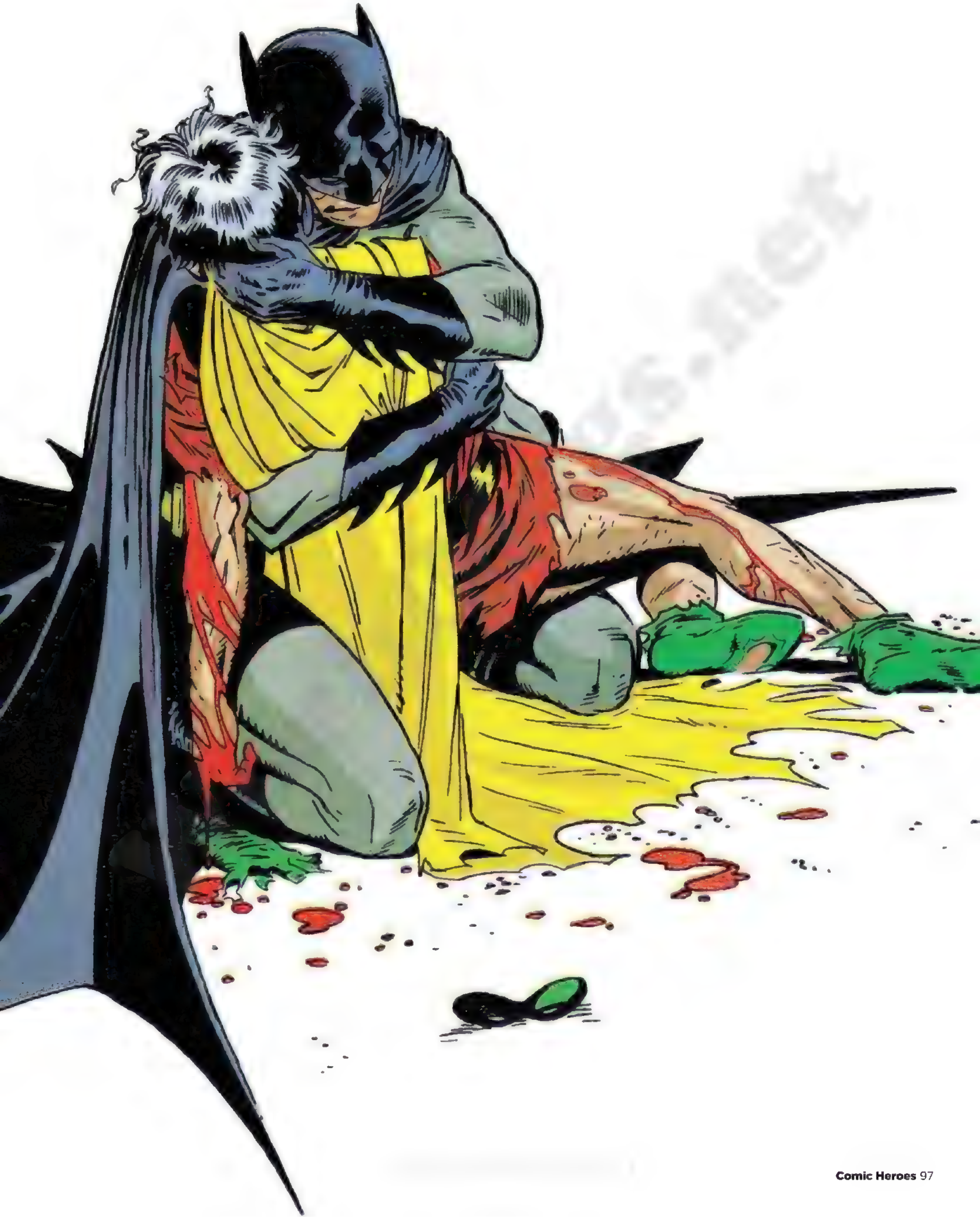
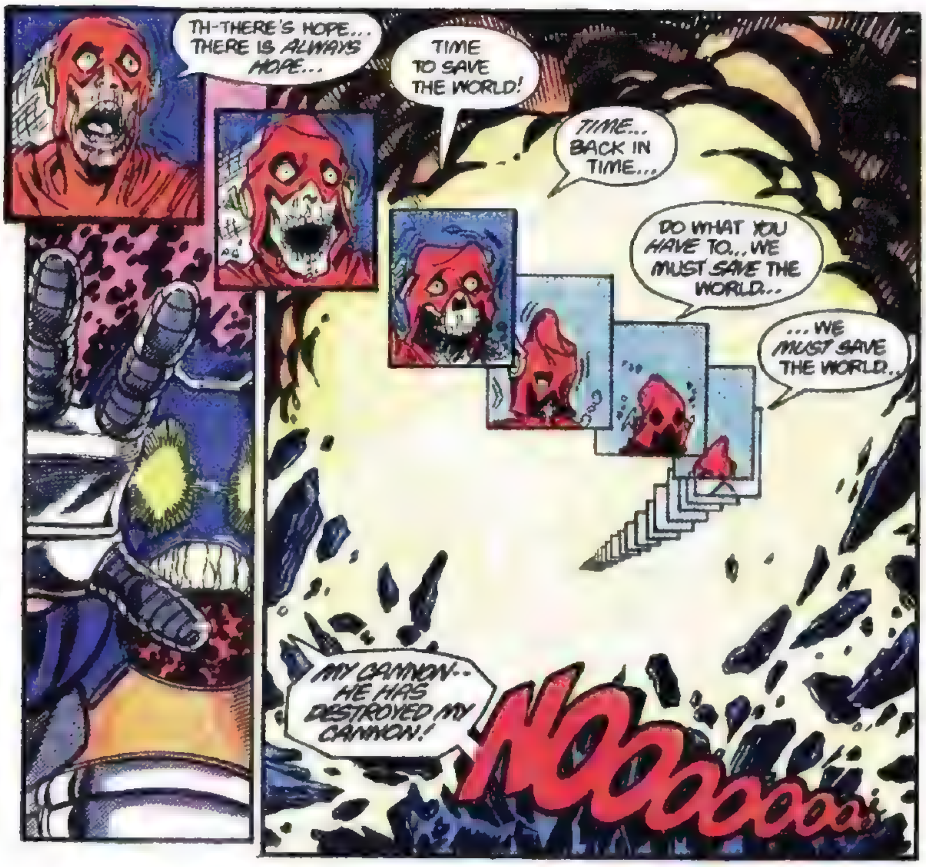
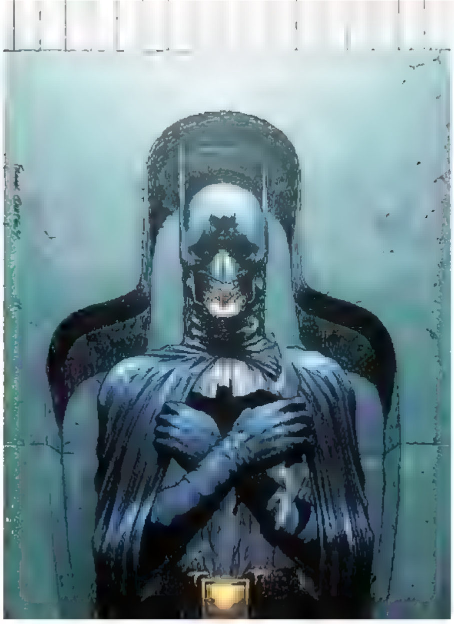
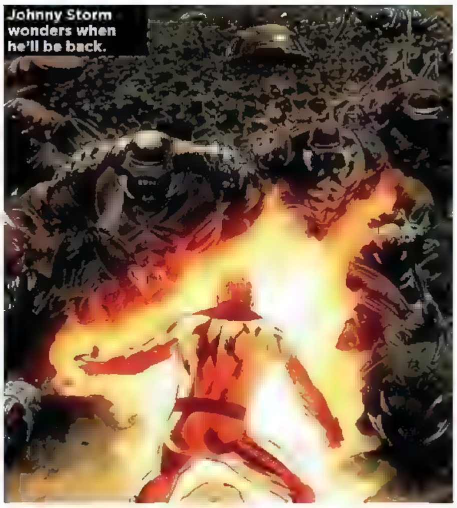
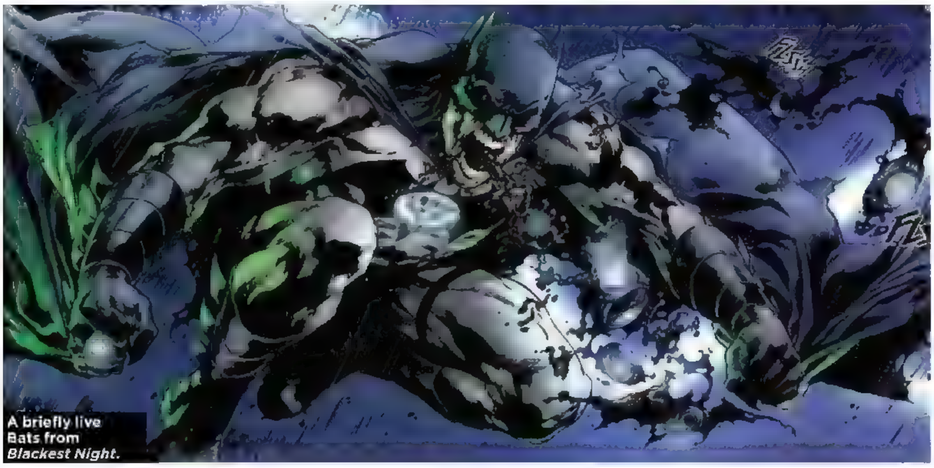
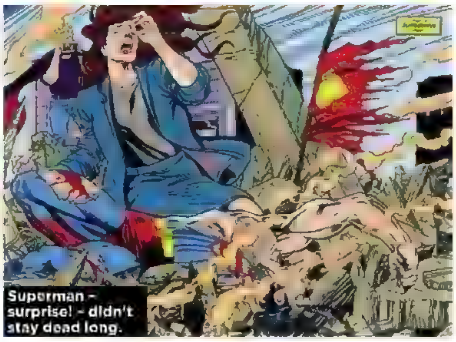



TH-THERE'S HOPE... THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE...
TIME TO SAVE THE WORLD!
TIME... BACK IN TIME...
DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO... WE MUST SAVE THE WORLD...
...WE MUST SAVE THE WORLD...
MY CANNON-- HE HAS DESTROYED MY CANNON!
NOOOOOOOO




Johnny Storm wonders when he'll be back.


A briefly live Bats from *Blackest Night*.


Superman – surprise! – didn't stay dead long.

> **“Ultimate Blob eats Ultimate Wasp, so Ultimate Giant Man bites his head off”**

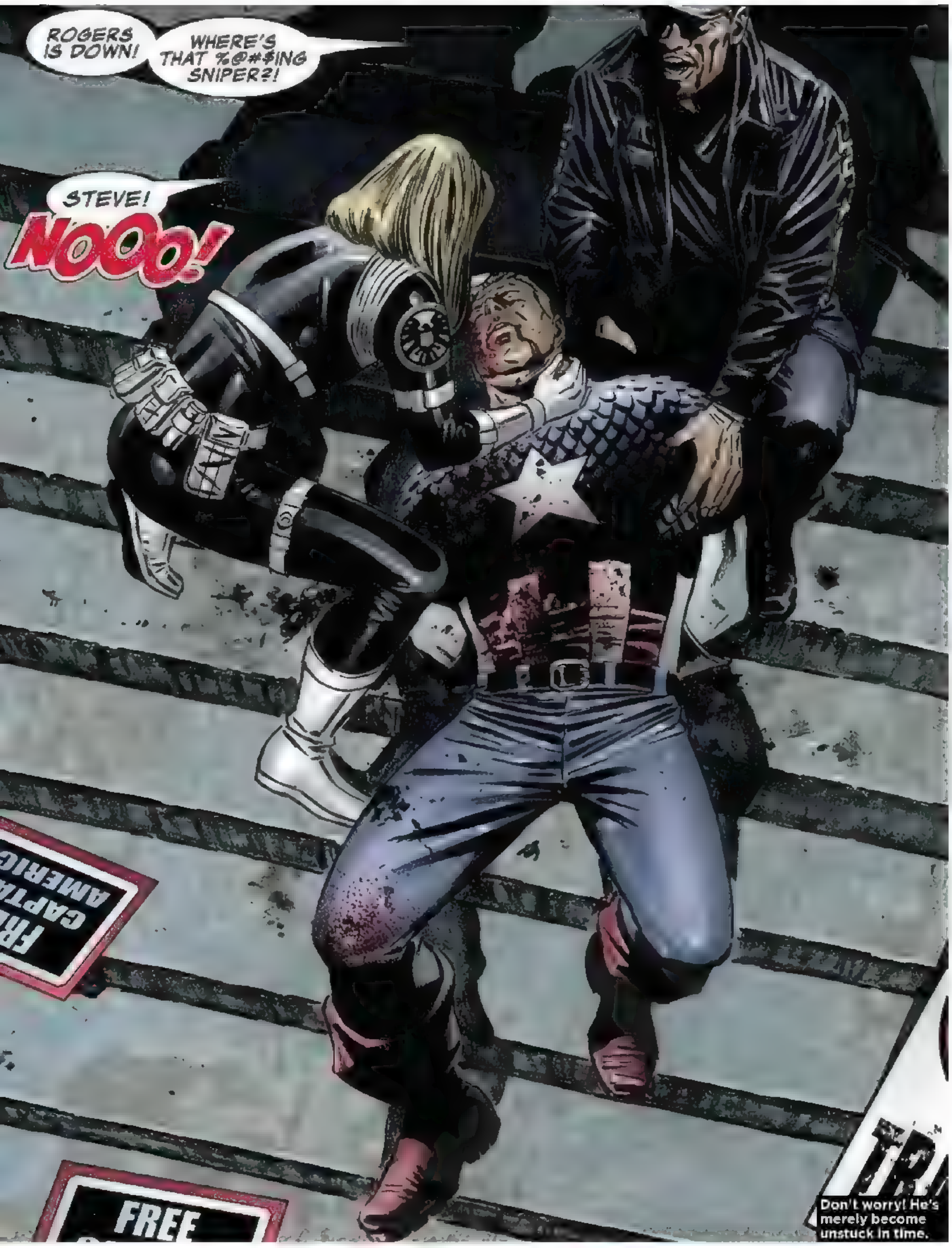
long ago, even in a comics' multiverse where characters rarely age and impossible things happen daily, the death of a major character was relatively rare – one every few years, perhaps. Back then the 'great deaths' meant something – Mar-Vell, Elektra, Gwen, Jean (the first time) – and even minor characters could be sent out in some style: who doesn't smile at the thought of Skurge the Executioner holding the bridge at Gjallerbru, or 'Mac' Hudson's desperate race against time to fix his broken Vindicator battlesuit?

These were both '80s tales, but it's somewhere in that decade's 'grim and gritty' period, in which lesser creators would struggle to reproduce the magic of Miller and Moore, that it all started to go wrong. The Flash would die in *Crisis On Infinite Earths*, but the meaning would be undercut twice: first by an identically powered, visually interchangeable replacement stepping into the breach, then by the actual guy returning from his eternal rest anyway. Hal Jordan would go evil, attempt genocide, die and return forgiven in a storyline that stretched through the '90s and beyond – and you can't help thinking Jim Shooter was right when he said, of Phoenix but relevant here, that there are some things you simply shouldn't be able to come back from.

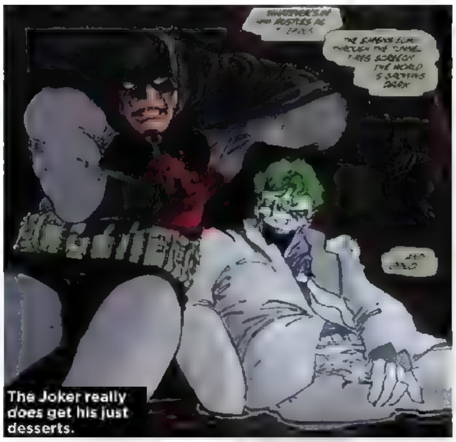
These days it's the rare comic book death that doesn't give the reader a sweet, immediate sugar rush of shock, followed by deep self-loathing – you've been suckered again. No, the best deaths of the past 20 years have almost exclusively been those that don't involve marquee characters, but are instead memorable moments, revealing character or advancing plot, in finite series: The Joker in *The Dark Knight Returns*, twisting his broken neck suicidally to frame Batman for murder; Agent 355 in *Y: The Last Man*, catching a sniper's round with the world saved; a sobbing Rorschach, forcing his friend to kill him; Morpheus, calm and dignified; Alan Moore's version of Mr Hyde, a bastard to the end – but our bastard. These are the killings that count.

SO, WHY DO THEY DO IT?

If comic book death is so annoying, so meaningless, why do they keep at it? The reasons, like the inventive ways they find to off folk (and bring them back), are myriad.


ROGERS IS DOWN!
WHERE'S THAT %@#$ING SNIPER?!
STEVE!
NOOO!
FREE

Don't worry! He's merely become unstuck in time.



The Joker really does get his just desserts.

Sometimes a character is born to die – like the tedious Thunderbird, wiped out at the start of *'New' X-Men* to prove things were now getting serious. Other times, as with grey squirrels, a cull is needed – hence Mark Gruenwald's '80s vigilante Scourge Of The Underworld, thinning out Marvel no-hoper villains like the Melter and Basilisk. Occasionally characters are wiped out en masse, swept from the board like a toddler interrupting a chess game, as happened to Alpha Flight in *New Avengers* (don't worry, they got better) or throughout *Ultimatum*, in which virtually everyone dies. (These are two Marvel examples, but a corpse-happy DC has become especially mean-spirited in this fashion over the last decade or so.)

At other times, death is used as a black joke only, sometimes effectively – Allfather D'Aronique splattered from a helicopter in *Preacher* – and sometimes merely queasily (Ultimate Blob eats Ultimate Wasp, so Ultimate Giant-Man bites his head off).

Ridiculous resurrections

How do you bring someone back from the dead? Let us count the ways...

1 **The Classic Retcon** Things are accepted to have taken place as originally shown, *except* something else happened at the same time, meaning our hero was actually lost in the time stream/whisked to another planet/whatever.

2 **The Cheeky Cheat** Our hero simulated their own death for some mystery purpose.

3 **The Dodgy Doctor** They *looked* dead, but they were really only in a coma or similar.

4 **The Mind-Swap** Yes, the body died, but consciousness was transferred elsewhere somehow.

5 **You Got the Wrong Guy** Someone died, certainly, but it turns out to have been an impostor all along.

6 **A Wizard Did It** Some supremely powerful magical being simply resurrects them.

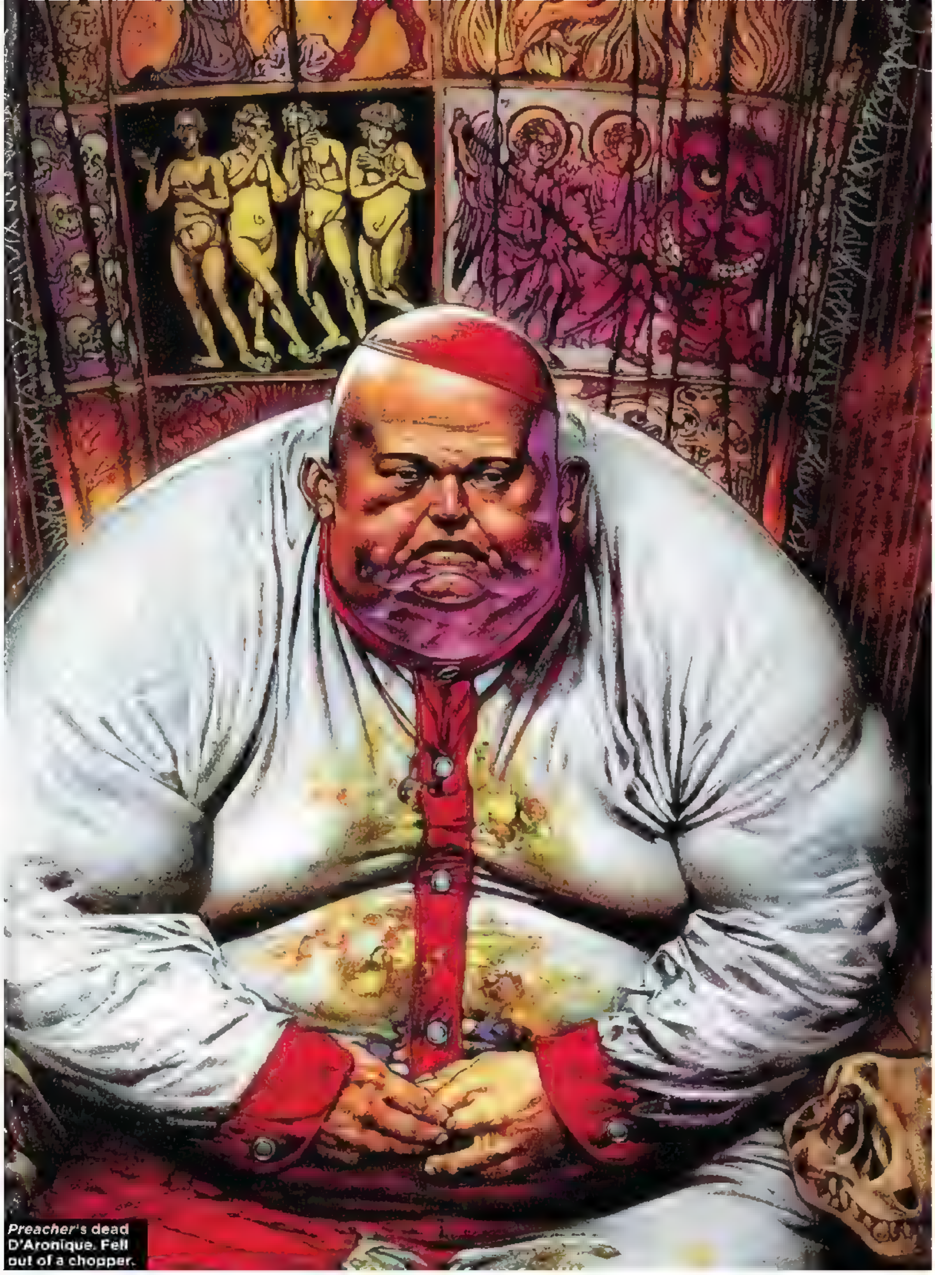
7 **The Valhalla Option** Your soul flees to some afterlife, and from there can perhaps have some limited interaction with the living.

8 **Time Travel** A younger version of our hero is plucked from earlier in the time stream as a fresh-faced replacement.

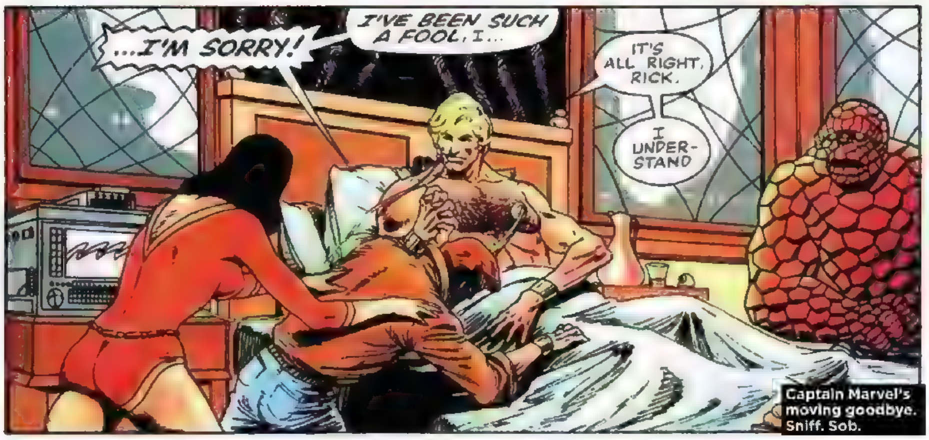
9 **Replacement Theory** Okay, so you're dead - but your young assistant looks and acts just like you now, so who cares?

10 **Reality Manipulation** Perhaps the biggest cheat of all, with continuity rewritten so earlier events 'never actually happened'.

Note: This list is by no means exhaustive. Optimus Prime once rebooted his entire personality from an old-school floppy disk backup; Spider-Man turned into a giant spider then gave birth to himself. The sad fact: *anything* can happen.



Preacher's dead D'Aronique. Fell out of a chopper.


...I'M SORRY!
I'VE BEEN SUCH A FOOL, I...
IT'S ALL RIGHT, RICK.
I UNDERSTAND

Captain Marvel's moving goodbye. Sniff. Sob.

Sometimes it's to shock us, and sometimes it's just to make us giggle – as with the deliberately goofy *Great Lakes Avengers*, where someone died virtually every issue. (This was brilliantly parodied in *The Simpsons*, of course, where an issue of *Radioactive Man* had him and Fallout Boy dying on *every* page).

Often a supporting character will be offed for what writers tend to call 'dramatic purposes', but we mostly think of as cheap attention-grabbing: the best friend slaughtered, the girlfriend dismembered (look in the fridge!), all to give our hero an excuse to a) fall to his knees and wail at the heavens, and b) go out and kick some righteous butt. Alex DeWitt, Candy Southern, Jean DeWolff, Karen Page: you and your sisters, we salute you all.

Most often, however, what we're talking about here is Death, the Great Sales Gimmick, never designed to be permanent; the crassest marketing tool in comics. It's a depressing parade of events: amazingly, the mainstream media reacts as if, this time, we really *are* going to kill off Superman (or Bats, or Cap); non-fans are suckered into trying out comics briefly; and the rest of us moan and gripe but wind up buying the damn things anyway. Such, it seems, is life. CH

Five (not) alive

Forget Doomsday and the head-spinning Batman RIP, these are the deaths that count...

5 **Uncle Ben** Outside of being very nice, Spidey's uncle wasn't much of a character. Doesn't matter: his role is teach lessons, inspire through guilt.

Did it take? So far.

4 **Thomas and Martha Wayne** They've teased us with backstory, but essentially Batman's parents are society cyphers, born to die - and thus inspire one of fiction's great acts of reinvention. Job done.

Did it take? Forever, we'd imagine.

3 **Captain Marvel** After saving the solar system, a hero of two worlds meets an enemy few prevail against: cancer.

Did it take? Brilliantly, respectfully, yes.

2 **Gwen Stacy** Accidentally dropped from a bridge by an uncaring Goblin, but the neck-snap comes through Spidey's (flawed) rescue technique. A generation weeps.

Did it take? Some clone shenanigans, but on the whole yes.

1 **Jean Grey/Phoenix** The mutant nation's sweetheart gains godlike power, loses control - and likes it. Her friends fight for her, but she plays the final card.

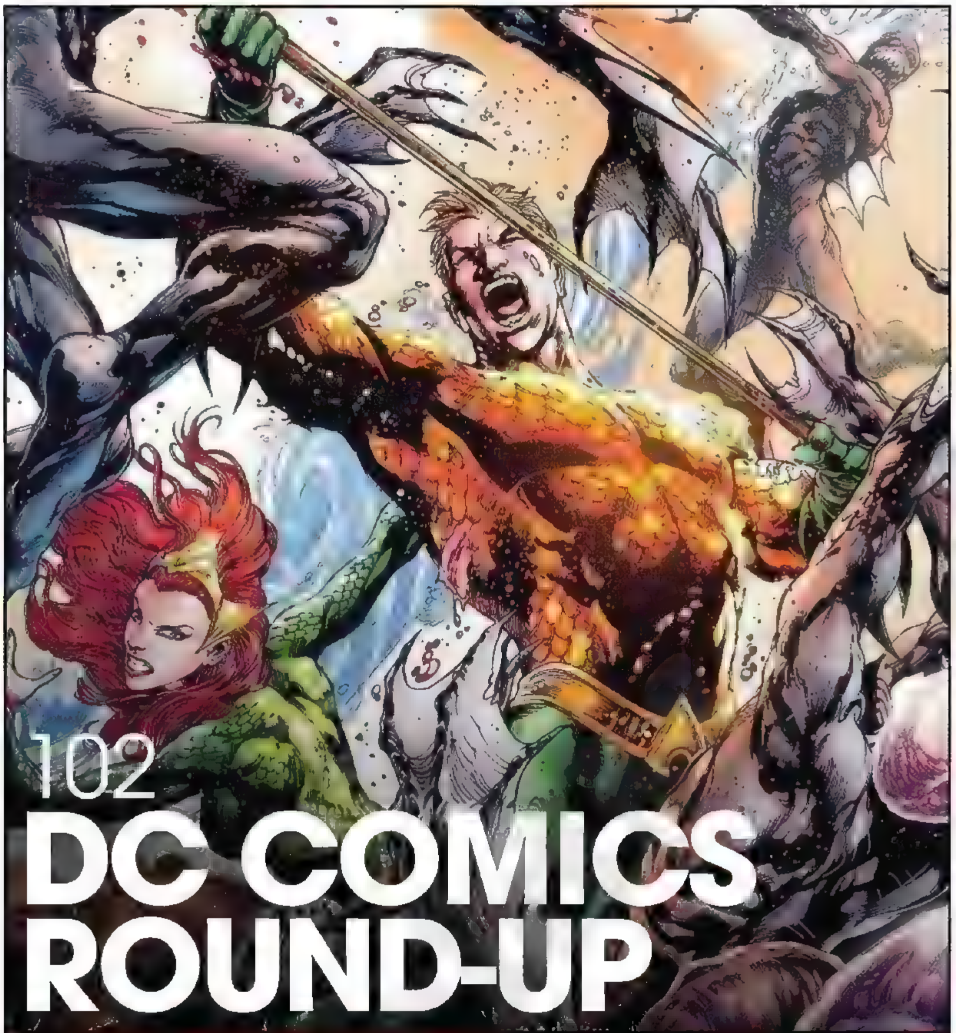
Did it take? No, but for once we don't mind. (The clue's in the name.)

COMIC HEROES' RATINGS AND VERDICTS

REVIEWS

RATINGS EXPLAINED

BRILLIANT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
AVERAGE	★★★
PRETTY POOR	★★
RUBBISH!	★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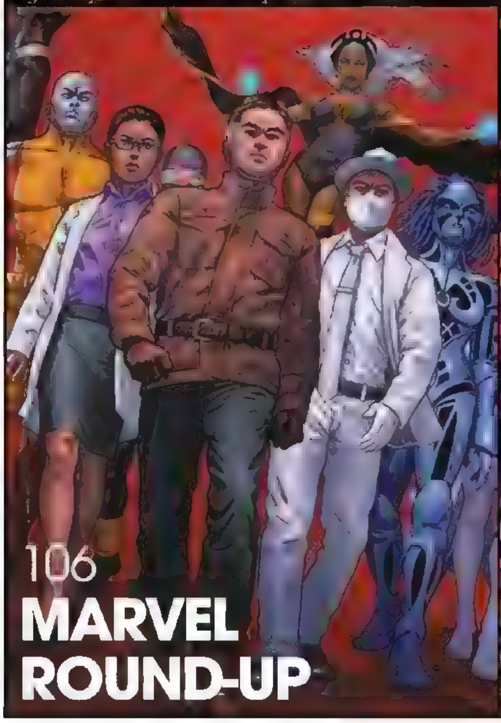
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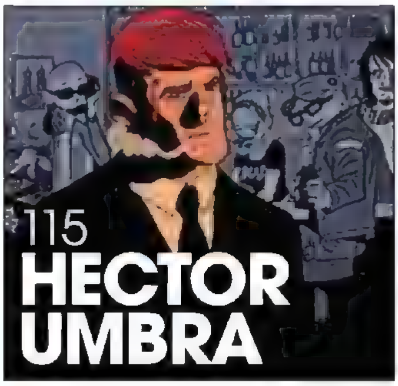
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HECTOR UMBRA

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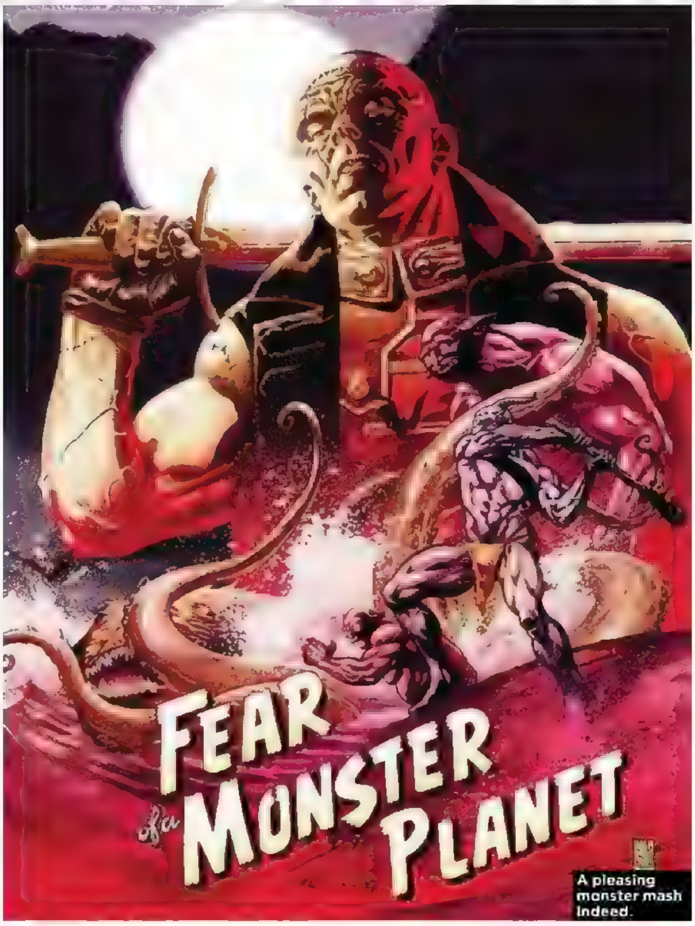
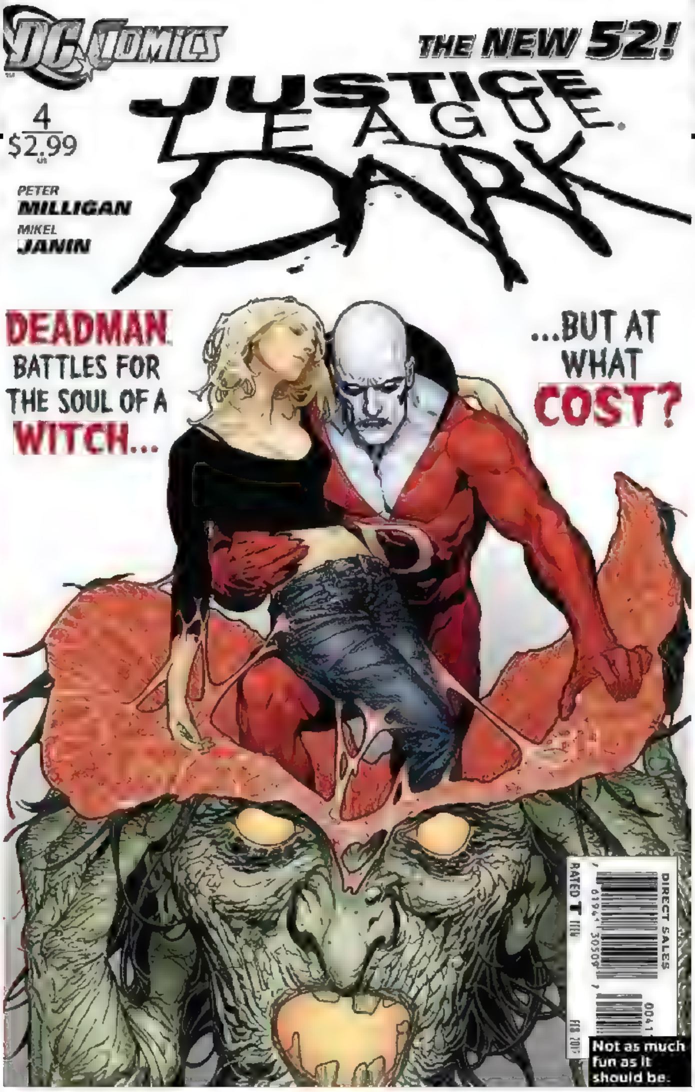

FEAR of a MONSTER PLANET

A pleasing monster mash indeed.



Not as much fun as it should be.

DC ROUND-UP

How fares the New 52? Let's have a little look-see...

AQUAMAN
WRITER: Geoff Johns
ARTISTS: Ivan Reis and Joe Prado
OUT: Now
★★★★

GREEN LANTERN
WRITER: Geoff Johns
ARTISTS: Doug Mahnke, Christian Alamy and Keith Champagne
OUT: Now
★★★

RED LANTERNS
WRITER: Peter Milligan
ARTISTS: Ed Benes, Diego Bernard and Rob Hunter
OUT: Now
★★

JUSTICE LEAGUE DARK
WRITER: Peter Milligan
ARTIST: Mikel Janin
OUT: Now
★★★

O.M.A.C.
WRITER: Dan Didio
ARTISTS: Keith Giffen and Scott Koblish
OUT: Now
★★★

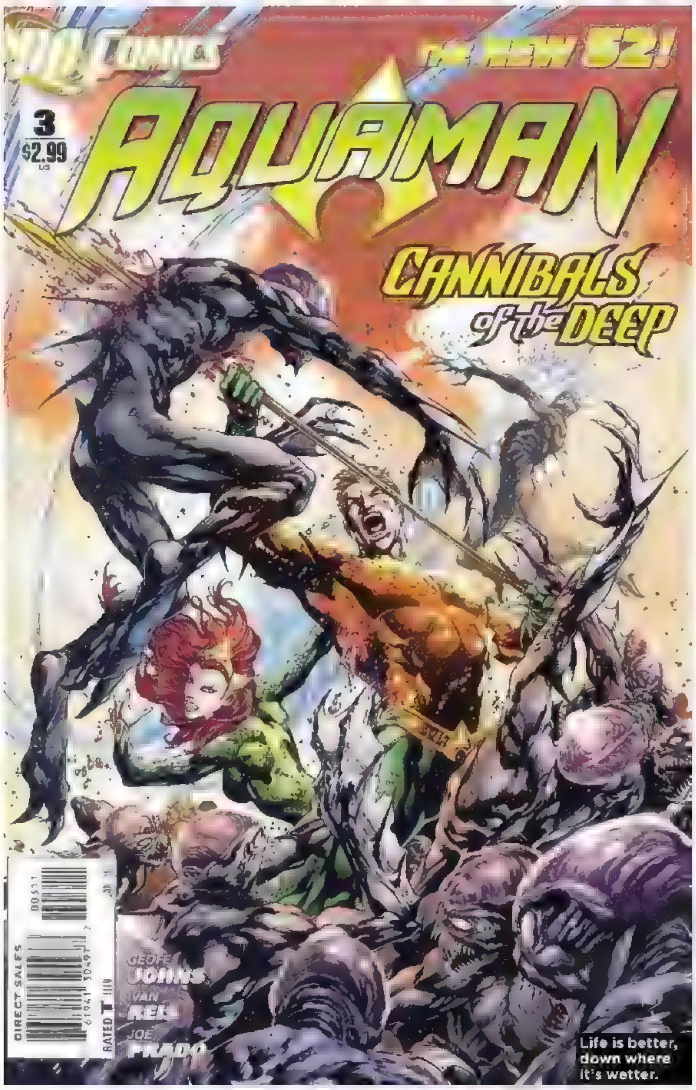
FRANKENSTEIN: AGENT OF S.H.A.D.E.
WRITER: Jeff Lemire
ARTIST: Alberto Ponticelli
OUT: Now
★★★★

Six months into the launch of the New 52 and it's time for a health check. Geoff Johns and Jim Lee kicked off the rebooted DC universe in fine style with their widescreen *Justice League*, while Grant Morrison has propelled the Man of Steel into the 21st century in *Action Comics*. Scott Snyder has led the sales charts and the creative stakes with his superlative *Batman* and equally excellent *Swamp Thing* rebirth, while his good buddy Jeff Lemire's brilliantly twisted *Animal Man* has proved to be the breakout title to date. However, other books have enjoyed a mixed reception from fans and critics alike.

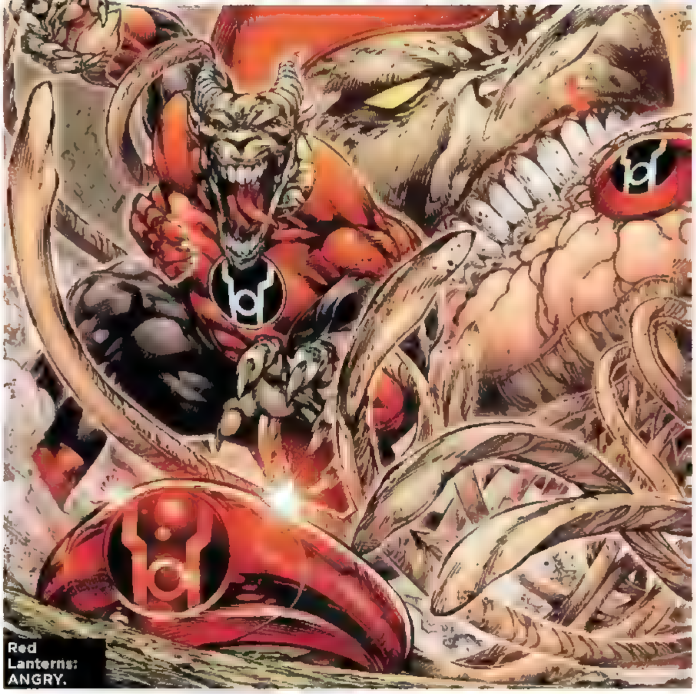
Just as Brian Azzarello's bold Wonder Woman reinvention has hopefully finally elevated William Moulton Marston's creation to the esteemed status that she deserves, Geoff Johns and Ivan Reis should surely place the much-maligned Aquaman on a surer footing. Previous attempts to freshen up Arthur Curry have been greeted with the same muted response afforded Marvel's various, similarly unsuccessful, incarnations of their own water-breathing monarch, the Submariner. More even-tempered than the hot-headed Namor, Johns and erstwhile *Green Lantern* penciller Reis have wisely done away with the ill-advised hook arm and emphasised his relationship and partnership with Mera. Bringing to mind a super-charged *Piranha*, opening four-parter 'The Trench' finds a swarm of primeval predators rising from the hidden depths of the bottom of the ocean to devour the residents of Aquaman's hometown. Dropping hints about future plotlines involving the mysterious fate of Atlantis, Johns sets the scene nicely and there's even some light relief with the addition of 'Aquadog'. His taut, breathless script is deftly executed by the ever-dynamic Reis, who proves equally adept at both quieter emotional moments and exhilarating action sequences. Maybe Aquaman has found his land legs at last.

LIGHT WORK

While some characters such as Grant Morrison's youthful Superman have been radically transformed in the wake of the New 52, other heroes like Batman have changed very little, or not all. With Green Lantern making his big screen debut last summer, DC could have used the opportunity to overhaul the emerald ring-slinger for the benefit of new readers but instead chose to stay with the status quo. But long-time scribe Geoff Johns provides a suitable jumping-on point with malevolent schemer Sinestro returning to the ranks of the Green Lantern Corp, leaving the now de-powered Hal Jordan dependent upon his bitter foe. While the opening five-part arc mostly takes place on Sinestro's home planet, a more earthbound storyline might have proved a clearer introduction to newcomers,



Life is better, down where it's wetter.



Red Lanterns: ANGRY.

DC COMICS
THE NEW 52!
3
$2.99
GREEN LANTERN
CORPS!
JOHNS MAHNKE

DC COMICS
THE NEW 52!
4
$2.99
OMAC
OUT!

who could struggle to get up to speed with the not inconsiderable legacy of Johns' seven-year tenure on the book to date. Still, with the reignition of Hal and Carol Ferris' romance and a band of rogue Guardians conspiring to replace the Green Lanterns with something more sinister, there are still plenty of enticing developments to keep you turning the pages.

When Geoff Johns first introduced the idea of different coloured Lantern Corps (based around the rainbow-inspired aspects of the emotional spectrum) in the build-up to 2009 crossover *Blackest Night*, it seemed like a logical and intriguing extrapolation. But fuelled by pure rage, the anger-based Red Lanterns lack the necessary charisma and essential individuality to warrant their own ongoing title with the cumbersome, brutish Atrocitus making for a charmless lead protagonist. Hampered by funereal pacing and an overwrought sense of tension, Peter Milligan's lacklustre script spends most of the first four issues on the back-story of Atrocitus' indistinct minions, like the Harley Quinn-esque Bleez, while the arrival of human Red Lantern John Moore is frustratingly drawn out.

> **“Maybe Aquaman has found his land legs at last”**

SHADOW MEN

The current *Hellblazer* author fares better with *Justice League Dark*, which purports to bring together several of DC's mystically based characters. Revolving around Madame Xanadu's bid to prevent the Enchantress' one-time foil June Moone from falling into the clutches of her now separated alter ego, the ever-mounting complications of the over-arching storyline threaten to collapse in on itself, but Milligan does an admirable job of juggling the disparate personas of Vertigo stalwarts like John Constantine and Shade the Changing Man who, like Swamp Thing and Animal Man, are welcome returnees to the shadowy edges of the DC Universe.

Given that the New 52's inaugural crossover takes place within its pages, it's disappointing that *O.M.A.C.* is amongst its first casualties, scheduled to conclude with April's *#8* alongside other strugglers such as *Hawk And Dove* and *Static Shock*. But ever since Jack Kirby created the One-Man Army Corp in 1974, various relaunches have failed to gel with the readership over the years and for all its updated talk of nanospires, Dan DiDio and Keith Giffen's latest effort hasn't performed any better. Still, as this memorable encounter with Frankenstein demonstrates, latest incumbent Cadmus Industries' scientist Kevin Kho makes for an intriguing host for O.M.A.C., and DiDio's vibrant writing is well served by Keith Giffen's suitably Kirby-esque chunky linework.

With Frankenstein set on O.M.A.C.'s tail by Checkmate, Didio and *Agent of S.H.A.D.E.*'s Jeff Lemire smartly depict proceedings from their particular character's perspective in their respective titles, even down to duplicating some of the same dialogue and captions. Not as immediately striking as *Animal Man*, *Frankenstein* is one of the New 52's more oddball offerings, providing Lemire with a plethora of opportunities to let rip, although the refigured Creature Commandos are a bit too reminiscent of *Hellboy* offshoot *B.P.R.D.* With his delicate, detailed rendering, Alberto Ponticelli provides a refreshing contrast to Giffen's looser cartooning. While *O.M.A.C.* at least goes out in style, the best may be yet to come for DC's patchwork monster with the original Creature Commandos just around the corner. **Stephen Jewell**

JON SABLE FREELANCE OMNIBUS 2

WRITER: Mike Grell
ARTIST: Mike Grell
PUBLISHER: IDW
OUT: Now
★★★★

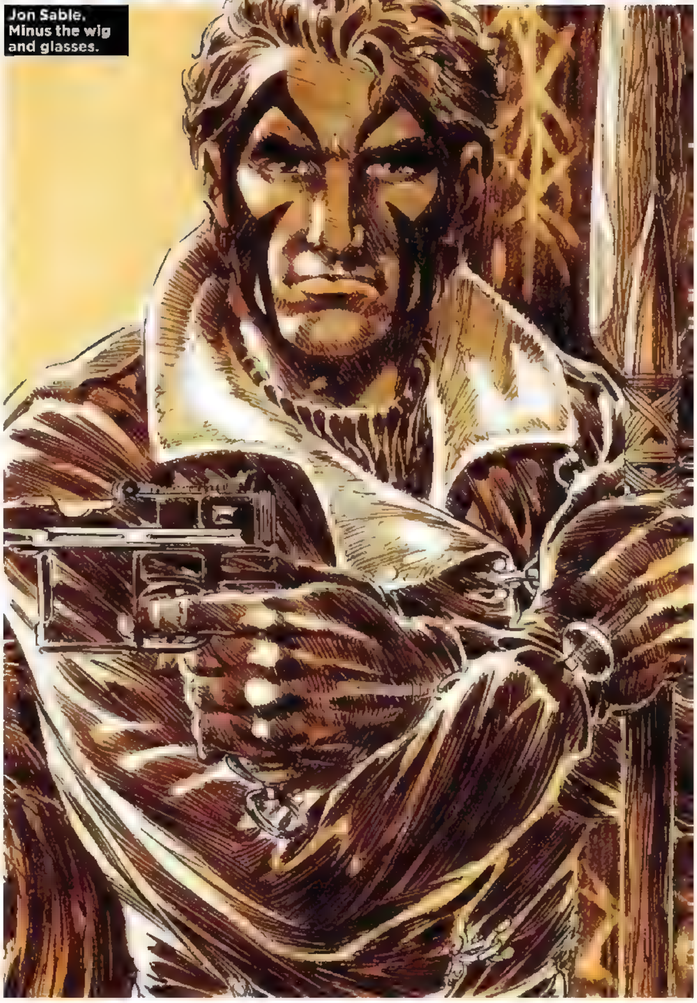
RULES OF THE HUNT

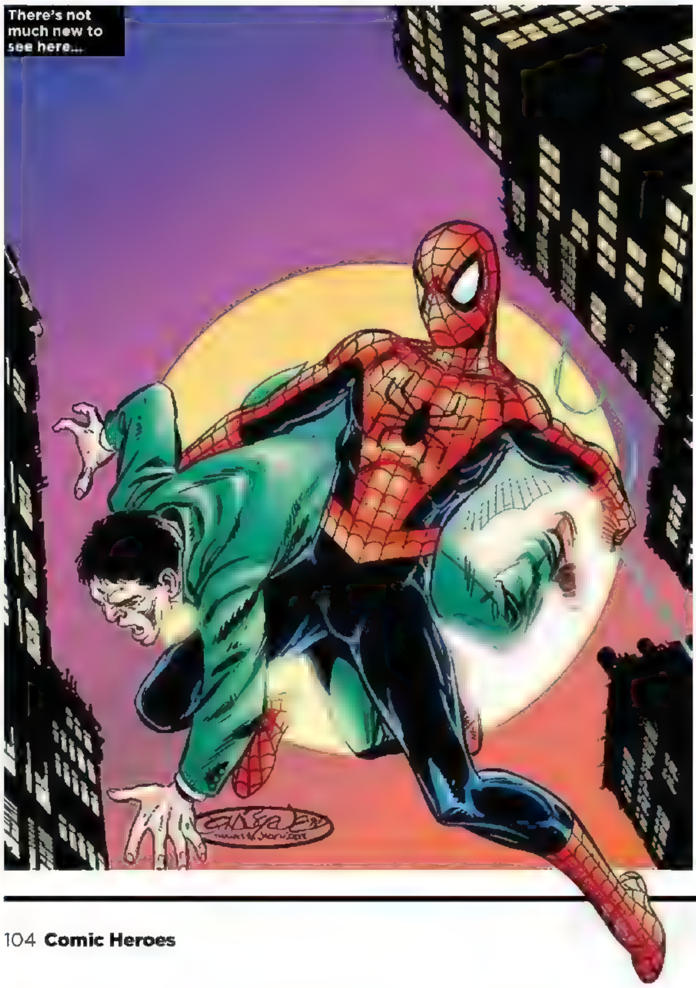
Jon Sable Freelance was writer/artist Mike Grell's baby: a series he lavished great care and attention on, at least for its first 30-odd issues, after which he seemed to lose interest. This second collection of the initial mid-'80s run takes us up to *#33*, more or less the quality cut-off point, and is thoroughly good stuff.

Jon Sable is a former Olympic pentathlete who became a soldier of fortune after his family was killed by poachers. He moonlights as a bestselling children's author, going by the pseudonym of BB Flemm(!) and wearing peardrop specs and a bubble-perm wig for disguise when he makes public appearances. The cutesy alter-ego aspect is somewhat hard to swallow, but otherwise *Sable* is excellent thriller fiction, as our hero takes on missions involving defecting Russian ballet dancers, Middle Eastern terrorists, the theft of the bird statuette in *The Maltese Falcon* and an arms deal in Nicaragua.

> **“He wears peardrop specs and a bubble-perm wig”**

The Cold War politics and limited colour palette date the stories somewhat, but the supporting cast is well developed and Jon Sable himself – self-conscious about his lack of height and worried about encroaching middle age – is a compellingly credible, 3D character. **James Lovegrove**


Jon Sable. Minus the wig and glasses.


There's not much new to see here...

SPIDER-MAN CHAPTER ONE

WRITER: John Byrne
ARTIST: John Byrne
PUBLISHER: Marvel
OUT: Now
★★★

Having rebooted Superman so successfully for DC with his 1986 *Man Of Steel* miniseries, John Byrne was commissioned by Marvel to do the same for its flagship character 12 years later. Lightning, however, failed to strike twice.

Over a dozen issues (a baker's dozen if you include the *#0*) Byrne retells Spider-Man's backstory and his initial clashes with members of his rogues' gallery such as the Lizard, Mysterio, Kraven and the Green Goblin.

There are a few new wrinkles here and there. Most significantly, Byrne ties Spidey's origin in with the explosive accident that fused Dr Otto Octavius' metal tentacles to his body and created the mad scientist Dr Octopus.

Apart from this, however, and some pretty minor costume redesigns, everything else is pretty much as we know it from the Lee/Ditko glory days.

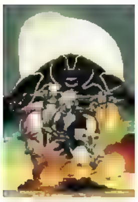
All of which means that *Spider-Man Chapter One* is ultimately a bit "so what?".

Byrne could never be accused of phoning it in – he's too much of a pro for that – but at times his art here seems slapdash, not least when inked by the sloppy brush of Al Milgrom, and his writing nicely apes Lee's bombast and vigour but doesn't properly develop a voice of its own.

Since Marvel itself quickly decided to disregard Byrne's tweakings, it's safe to say that we can do the same. Fun, but inessential. **James Lovegrove**

FEAR ITSELF
THUNDERBOLTS HC

WRITER: Jeff Parker
ARTISTS: Kev Walker, Declan Shalvey
PUBLISHER: Marvel
OUT: Now
★★★



With their strongest member transformed into a mindless destructive force by the Serpent's hammer, the Thunderbolts must simultaneously contain the inmates of the Raft, stop a horde of Asgardian zombies invading Iraq and somehow do one thing that's flat-out impossible: stop the Juggernaut.

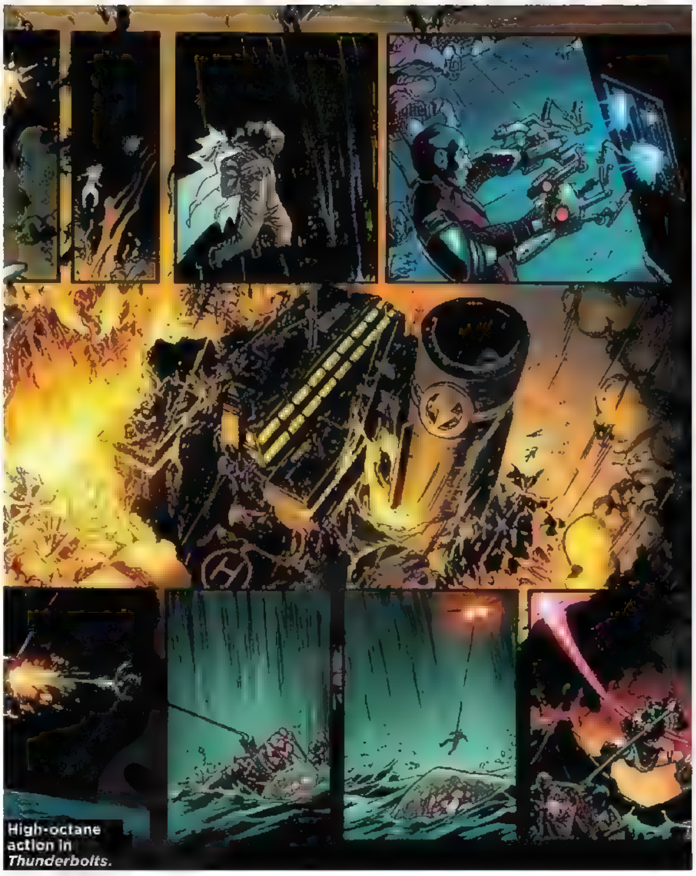
All in a day's work for Marvel's premier super-villain team. One of the more enjoyable *Fear Itself* tie-ins, Jeff Parker's sharp dialogue and strong characterisation combine with Kev Walker and Declan Shalvey's punky artwork to turn a mediocre premise (Juggernaut gets hammer; smashes things) into a dense and fast-paced piece of work.

The cast is positively immense, spotlighting A-listers (Luke Cage!) alongside villains obscure enough to delight any Marvel Universe fan (Boomerang!), while the story bounces around the globe like a big-budget action movie.

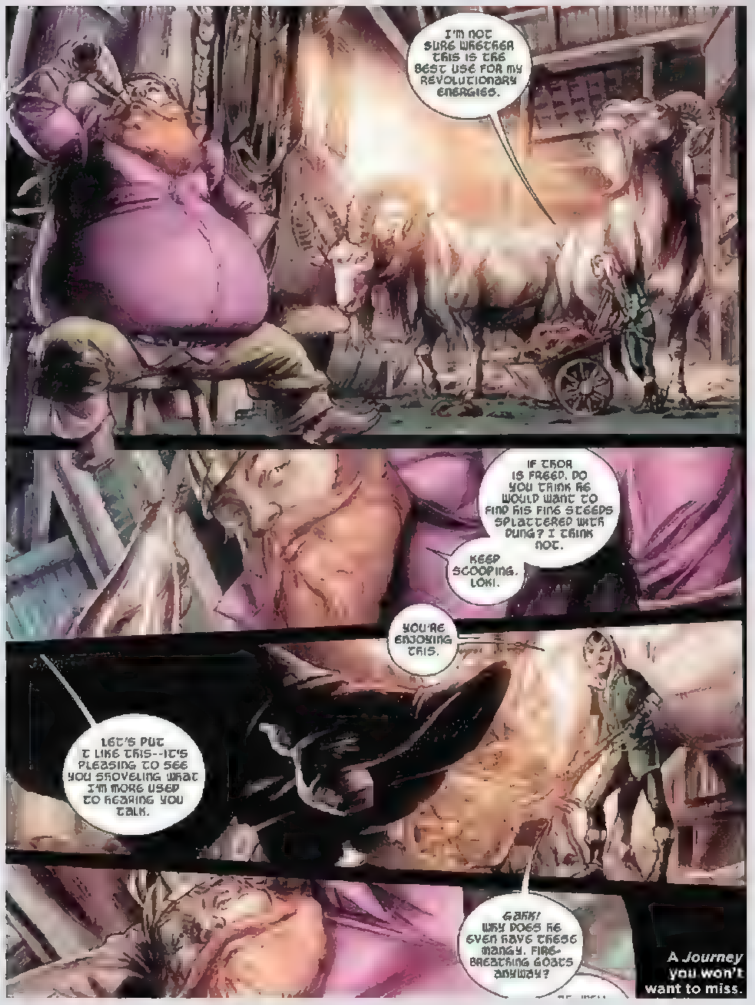
Although it complements *Fear Itself* well, it's perhaps not quite as strong as a standalone piece of work.

Composed of several satellite plotlines, it sacrifices large-scale cohesion, and the story doesn't so much reach a climax as get cauterised – but such is the curse of the tie-in.

Thunderbolts fans and *Fear Itself* readers will surely enjoy it, but despite the technical quality, it's far from the best place to make your first foray into the series. **James Hunt**



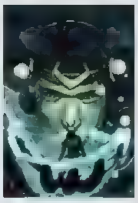
High-octane action in *Thunderbolts*.


I'M NOT SURE WHETHER THIS IS THE BEST USE FOR MY REVOLUTIONARY ENERGIES.
IF THOR IS FREED, DO YOU THINK HE WOULD WANT TO FIND HIS FINE STEEDS SPLATTERED WITH DUNG? I THINK NOT.
KEEP SCOOPING, LOKI.
YOU'RE ENJOYING THIS.
LET'S PUT I LIKE THIS--IT'S PLEASING TO SEE YOU SHOVELING WHAT I'M MORE USED TO HEARING YOU TALK.
GAHK! WHY DOES HE EVEN HAVE THESE MANGY, FIRE-BREATHING GOATS ANYWAY?

A *Journey* you won't want to miss.

FEAR ITSELF
JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY HC

WRITER: Kieron Gillen
ARTIST: Doug Braithwaite
PUBLISHER: Marvel
OUT: Now
★★★★★



As the heroes of the Marvel Universe face the Serpent's forces, the newly-teenaged Loki decides to make some behind-the-scenes assists. His goal? Saving the world, of course. Not that anyone believes him...

Despite the issue numbering (*#622-#636*), this is the first arc of a new *Journey Into Mystery* series which stars Kid Loki, the youthful reincarnation of Thor's villainous brother. However, the book delivers far beyond its offbeat premise, its intricate plotting, high-concept themes and expansive fantasy world recalling Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*. Impressively, it survives such comparisons. Writer Kieron Gillen has turned Loki into a devastatingly charming lead, with an ambiguous innocence that forces readers and cast alike to merely guess the extent of his manipulations.

Although it's hard to get away from that *Fear Itself* logo on the front, this does take the scenic route through the event, working seamlessly as both tie-in and stand-alone piece. Regardless of your interest in Marvel's Asgardian canon, this is the place to start reading *Journey Into Mystery*. Years from now, you don't want to be the one admitting that you passed on this at the time. You have been warned. **James Hunt**

> **“The book delivers far beyond its offbeat premise”**

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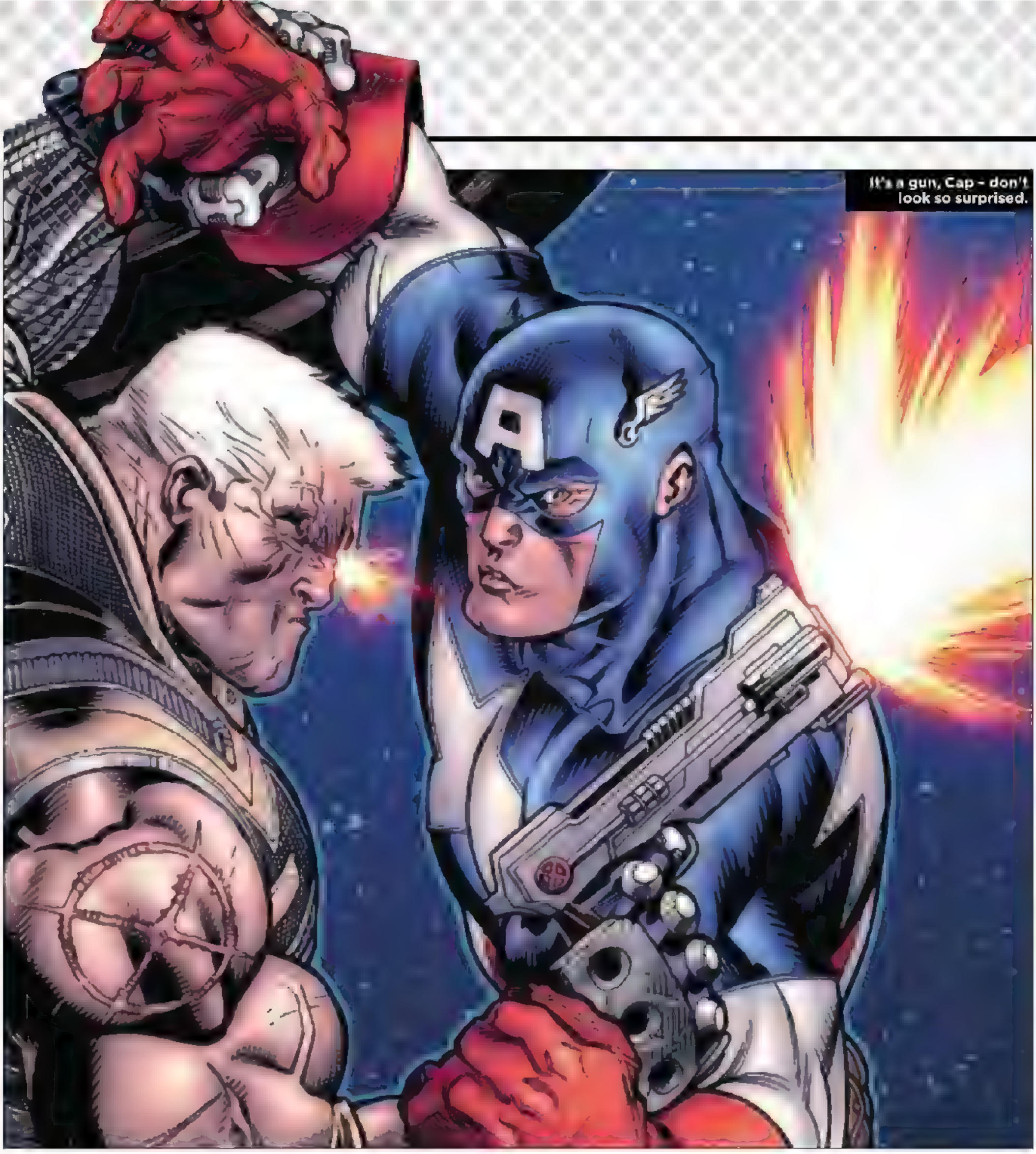

It's a gun, Cap - don't look so surprised.

MARVEL ROUND-UP

Our regular look at the best of Marvel's monthly issues...

AVENGERS: X-SANCTION
WRITER: Jeph Loeb
ARTISTS: Ed McGuinness and Dexter Vines
OUT: Now
★★★

DEFENDERS
WRITER: Matt Fraction
ARTISTS: Rachel and Terry Dodson
OUT: Now
★★★★

WOLVERINE
WRITER: Jason Aaron
ARTISTS: Andy Kubert, Ron Garney and Steve Sanders
OUT: Now
★★★★

WOLVERINE AND THE X-MEN: ALPHA & OMEGA
WRITER: Brian Wood
ARTISTS: Roland Boschi, Dan Brown and Mark Brooks
OUT: Now
★★★

X-CLUB
WRITER: Simon Spurrier
ARTIST: Paul Davidson
OUT: Now
★★★★

SCARLET SPIDER
WRITER: Christopher Yost
ARTISTS: Ryan Stegman and Michael Babinski
OUT: Now
★★★

With *The Fearless* and *Battle Scars* stretching *Fear Itself* into 2012, Marvel's traditional summer comic book blockbuster and its innumerable spin-offs and crossovers seem to be beginning earlier every year and lasting longer. Although it isn't actually billed as such, it's hard not to view *Avengers: X-Sanction* as an unofficial prelude to the imminent *Avengers Vs X-Men*, given that it features mutant cyborg Cable returning from the far future to wreak revenge upon the Earth's Greatest Heroes for some misdeed that they have yet to inflict upon his adopted daughter Hope, who will host the deadly Phoenix Force once its rise from the proverbial ashes is complete. According to Marvel editor-in-chief Axel Alonso, the four-part series will contain 'portents' to events as opposed to clues, a fair summation given that Jeph Loeb's threadbare plot appears to be entirely composed of a sequence of increasingly bombastic smackdowns. After facing off against Captain America and the Falcon in *#1*, Cable battles Iron Man to a standstill in *#2* with the Red Hulk, Spider-Man and Wolverine waiting in the wings. Co-created by Rob Liefeld, Cyclops' long-lost son Nathan Summers' timey-wimey, *Terminator*-inspired origins are even more convoluted than The Doctor/River Song timeline. Presumed deceased after apparently perishing at the conclusion of 2007's 'Messiah Complex' X-crossover, it's either bad luck or lazy plotting that the techno-virus ravaging his systems means that Cable now only has 24 hours to live. But despite its inherent predictability, Loeb delivers an engaging script, which is well served by Ed McGuinness and Dexter Vines' fluid cartooning. It all starts here. You have been warned!

GREAT DEFENDERS

As JM DeMatteis and Don Perlin's underrated '80s run was one of the first Marvel titles I ever read, I have a soft spot for *The Defenders*, so it's good to see Matt Fraction and his one-time Uncanny X-Men foils Terry and Rachel Dodson reviving Marvel's most dysfunctional super-team. With the Hulk dispatching fellow founding members Doctor Strange, Namor and the Silver Surfer along with fresh recruits Iron Fist and the Red She-Hulk to confront the all-consuming Nul: Breaker Of Worlds, Fraction whips up a deftly nuanced tale that involves

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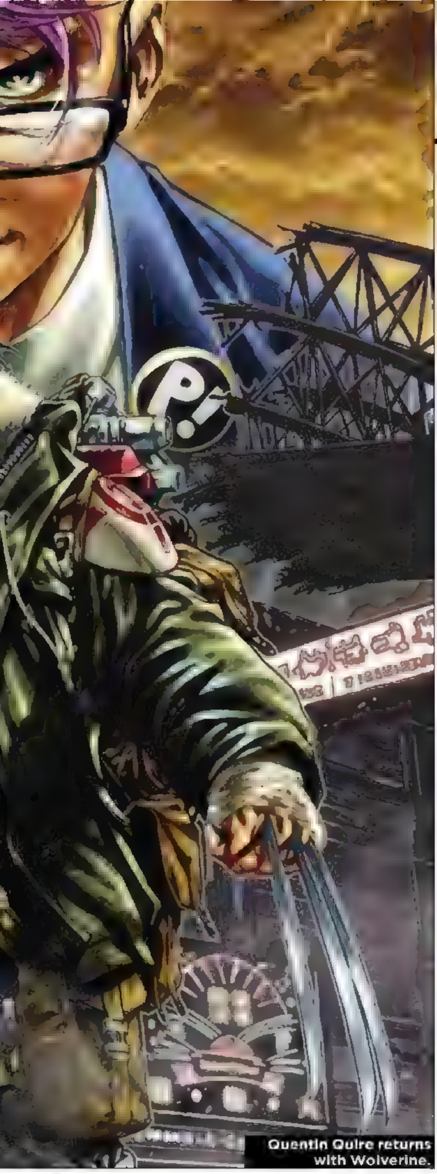
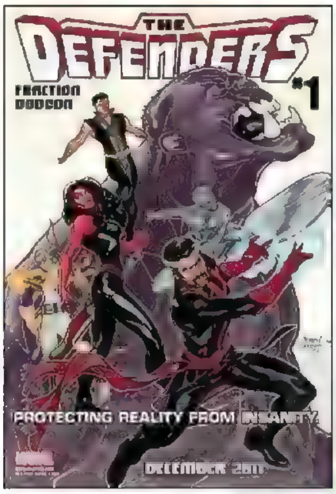
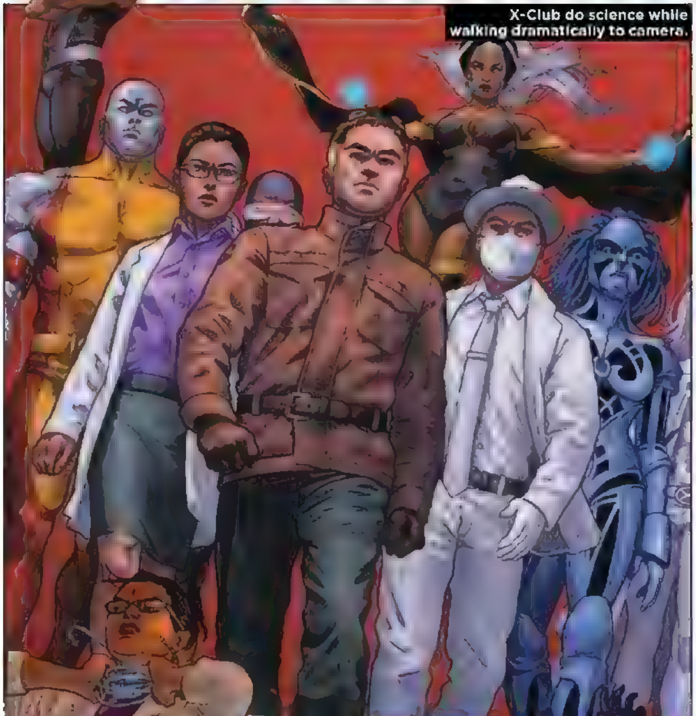
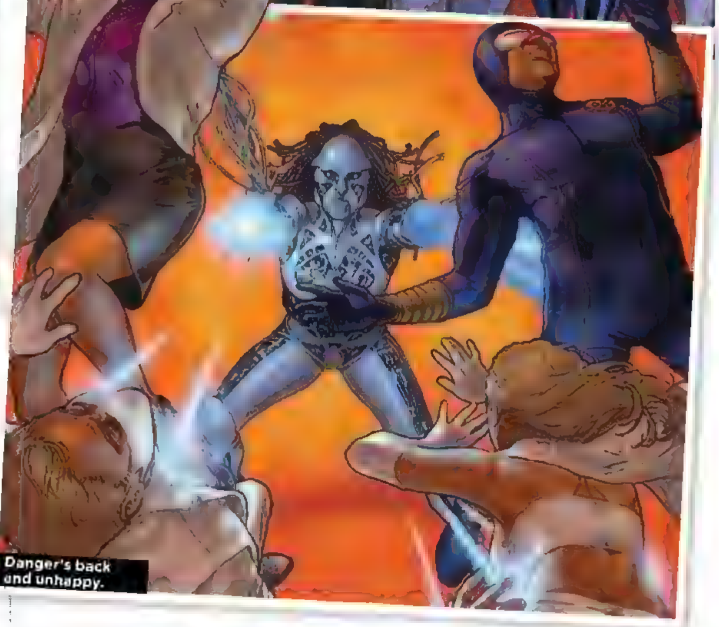


Quentin Quire returns with Wolverine.





X-Club do science while walking dramatically to camera.



Danger's back and unhappy.

legendary villain Prester John, the malevolent Wundagore Mountain and explosive god machine the Concordance Engine. Painting the Master of Mystical Arts as a philandering womaniser and Iron Fist as a mega-rich goofball, Fraction's characterisation sometimes feels slightly out of step with previous incarnations. But from Iron Fist reading a Marvelman comic to Doctor Strange levitating on the Eurostar and the Silver Surfer turning himself to snow, he fills the rapidly evolving story with plenty of delightfully subtle details. Now if Marvel can find a way to reconstitute the Champions, our nostalgia trip will be complete.

EASTERN PROMISE

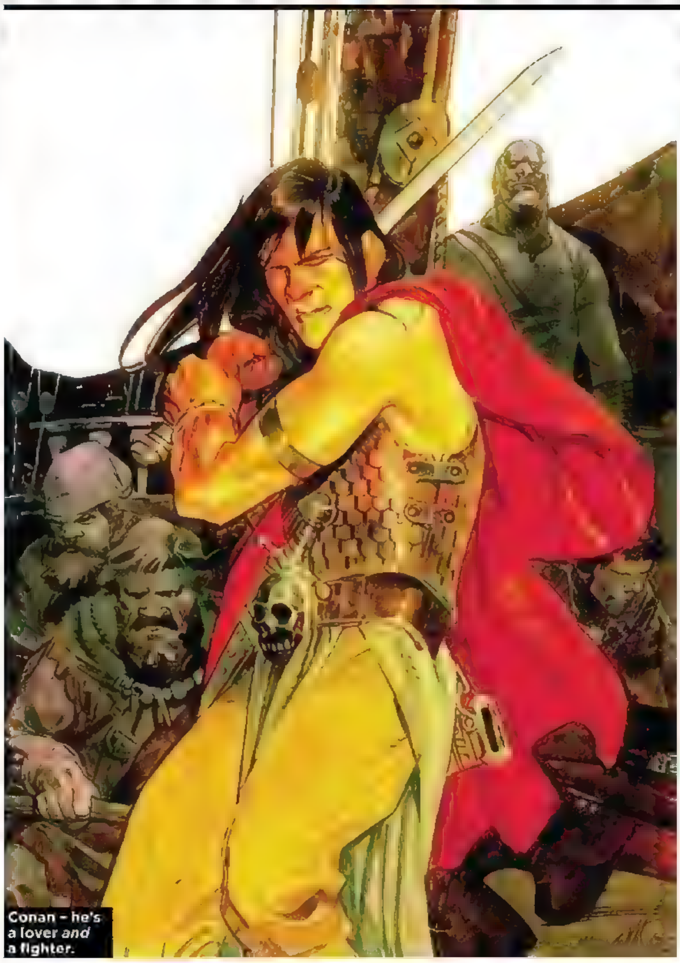
Heralding the beginning of Jason Aaron's final arc on the book, *Wolverine #300* also harks back to the '80s. Tipping its hat to Chris Claremont and Frank Miller's inaugural 1982 *Wolverine* limited series, it opens with Logan taking time away from his new position as headmaster of the Jean Grey School of Higher Learning to travel to Japan, where he and old flame Yukio, who has lost none of her dexterity despite being confined to a wheelchair, become embroiled in the emergence of a new Silver Samurai. From a bravura early confrontation between Wolvie and a horde of sharp-suited ninjas onboard a Tokyo-bound plane, Aaron choreographs the breathless action sequences with precision and verve, adding Sabretooth and Mystique to the fast-moving mix and seamlessly moving between Andy Kubert and Ron Garney's more kinetic chapters and Steve Sanders' more subdued moments. Definitely not the same old snikt!

THE OMEGA FILES

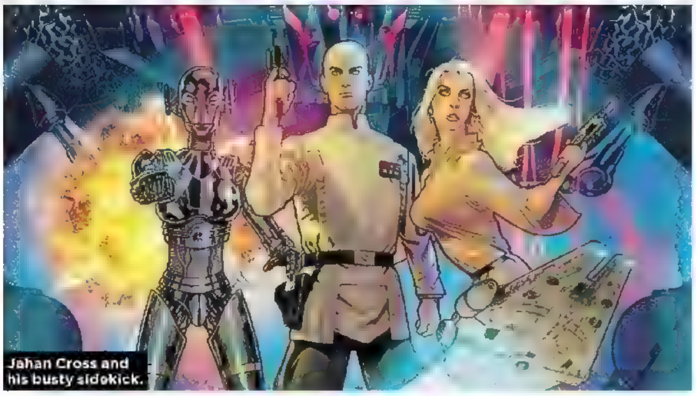
A decade after he collaborated with Warren Ellis on *Generation X*, Brian Wood is back on familiar territory as he returns to the House of Ideas and the X-line. Taking Wolverine's side of the Schism, *Alpha & Omega* focuses upon anarchic telepath Quentin Quire's Westchester rehabilitation as the self-styled Kid Omega plunges the sparring Wolverine and Armor into a computer game-like virtual reality. With Roland Boschi handling the school scenes and Mark Brooks the constructed scenario, the transition between the two storylines is handled with smooth aplomb with the two artists sometimes both contributing panels to the same page. Encompassing five issues in total, *Alpha & Omega*'s central premise seems a tad thin going forward but Wood surely has a few tricks left up his sleeve. Welcome back to the fold.

After numerous miniseries and one-offs over the past few years, *X-Club* must rank as Simon Spurrier's highest profile Marvel assignment to date. Not a mutant nightspot but the nom de guerre of the X-Men's scientific boffins Dr Nemesis, Madison Jeffries, Kavita Rao and cybernetic fatale Danger, 'We Do Science' is brimming with quotable dialogue – "These cellwastes wouldn't know science-snark if it was imprinted on their ribosomes" – and the priceless sight of a man with a starfish on his head. What more could you ask for?

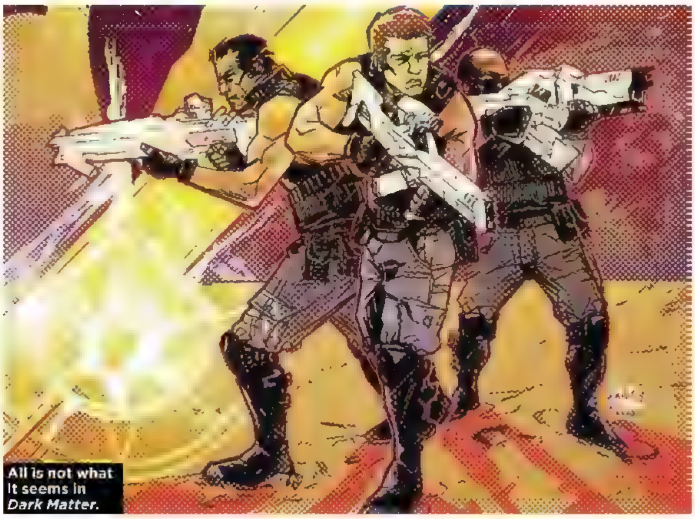
As a clone of Peter Parker, Kaine has struggled to escape from under the wall-crawler's considerable shadow. But after taking on the guise of the little-known Scarlet Spider at the recent conclusion of 'Spider Island', he is making a decent fist of striking out on his own, relocating to the superhero backwater of Houston, Texas. Christopher Yost effectively portrays the reformed criminal's moral dilemma as he inadvertently stumbles upon a people trafficking ring while Ryan Stegman's energetic pencils channel both Humberto Ramos and Frank Quitely. If this quality is maintained, pretty soon fans will be wondering 'Spidey who?' **Stephen Jewell**



Conan – he's a lover *and* a fighter.



Jahan Cross and his busty sidekick.



All is not what it seems in *Dark Matter*.

DARK HORSE ROUND-UP

Space adventures and sea battles from the House of Hellboy

STAR WARS: AGENT OF THE EMPIRE – IRON ECLIPSE

WRITER: John Ostrander
ARTISTS: Stéphane Roux and Julien Hugonnard-Bert
OUT: Now
★★★★

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

WRITER: Brian Wood
ARTIST: Becky Cloonan
OUT: Now
★★★★

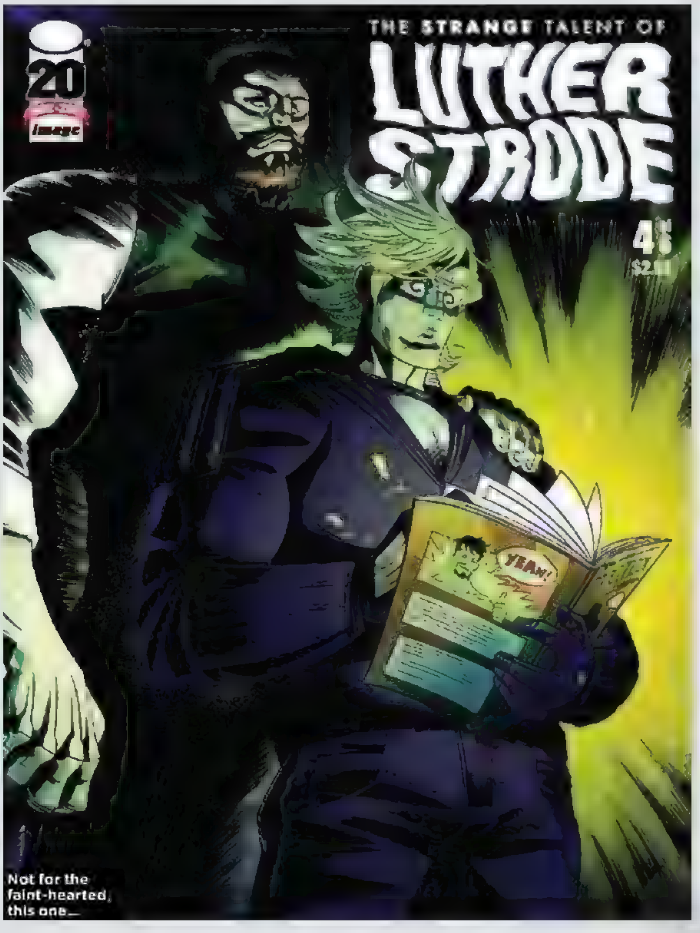
DARK MATTER

WRITERS: Joseph Mallozzi and Paul Mullie
ARTIST: Garry Brown
OUT: Now
★★★

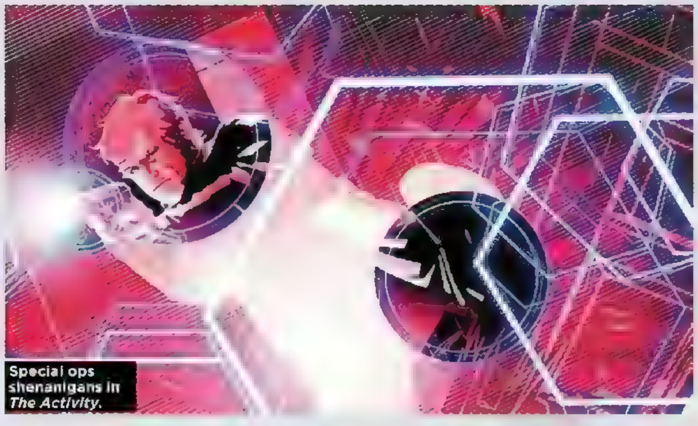
Twenty five years after Dark Horse published its inaugural *Star Wars* title, the Milwaukee-based independent is journeying back to the formative days of George Lucas' fabled universe in this month's *Dawn Of The Jedi*. But first the same author, John Ostrander, is launching new series *Agent Of The Empire*, which introduces intergalactic undercover agent Jahan Cross. An intimate knowledge of Dark Horse's *Star Wars* stable, or indeed the films, is not required to enjoy *Iron Eclipse*. As much a homage to the well-worn James Bond template, it boasts a blue-skinned femme fatale and an alien equivalent of Q with an ominous doomsday machine to come in the form of the Iron Eclipse itself. Described as the Empire's scalpel while the Stormtroopers are its hammer, the stoically professional Cross takes the ethical implications of working for Darth Vader in his considerable stride, viewing it as just another assignment. A memorable first issue encounter with Han Solo and Chewbacca hints at past connections between the super-spy and the famous freebooter but Cross doesn't need such historic links to be a worthy addition to the canon.

Considering the muted response that greeted Hollywood's *Conan The Barbarian* remake last year, the filmmakers might have been better off taking a leaf out of Dark Horse's comic book by turning to Robert E Howard's 1934 short story 'Queen Of The Black Coast'. The most-requested adaptation, which serves as a perfect introduction to the Cimmerian for new readers, resembles a Hyborian *Pirates Of The Caribbean*, combining swashbuckling sea battles with passionate romance. Opening with a renegade Conan hijacking a trading ship before pledging his life to the captain and crew, long-time collaborators Brian Wood and Becky Cloonan neatly capture not only his anarchic sense of humour and impetuous free spirit but also his sharp intelligence and strong moral centre. The transition from the furious dockyard battles to the eerie ocean scenes where Conan first encounters the sinister witch queen Bêlit is masterfully executed. By Crom! One of the best Howard comic books in all the ages.

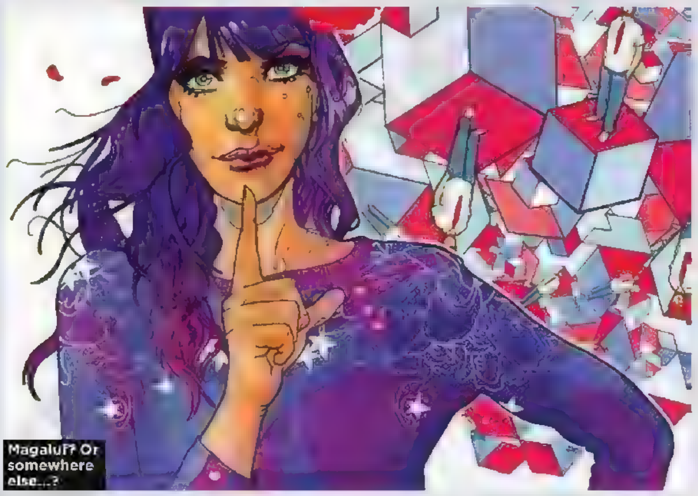
Penned by *Stargate* scripters Joseph Mallozzi and Paul Mullie, *Dark Matter* follows the well-worn example of the likes of *Alien* and *Avatar* by opening with the crew of a derelict spaceship waking up from stasis. But a deeper mystery quickly becomes apparent, as it seems that none of them remember who they are. Establishing character traits when your protagonists don't even know their own names is a difficult proposition but Mallozzi and Mullie pull it off as the cast fall back into familiar roles, although they have conveniently retained all their special abilities. Gradually building a tense sense of claustrophobia within the ramshackle, confined space that culminates with everyone at each other's throat, the tension is eventually dissipated by first the discovery of an Ash-esque figure and then an intriguing first issue cliffhanger. *Dark Matter* might boast all the requisite elements of a feature film pitch but it still makes for an engaging read. **Stephen Jewell**



Not for the faint-hearted, this one...



Special ops shenanigans in *The Activity*.



Magaluf? Or somewhere else...?

IMAGE ROUND-UP

Virtual holidays, gratuitous schoolroom violence and a gritty spy drama

THE INFINITE VACATION
WRITER: Nick Spencer
ARTIST: Christian Ward
OUT: Now
★★★★

THE STRANGE TALENT OF LUTHER STRODE
WRITER: Justin Jordan
ARTIST: Tradd Moore
OUT: Now
★★★

THE ACTIVITY
WRITER: Nathan Edmondson
ARTIST: Mitch Gerads
OUT: Now
★★★

There's probably no better comic book for our increasingly networked world than Nick Spencer and Christian Ward's *The Infinite Vacation*. Known for his vertigo-inducingly high concepts, the five-issue series is set in a near future where cutting-edge technology allows you to holiday in a myriad of alternate realities, in which the smallest, most mundane choices can lead to wildly different outcomes. From Surfer Dude Mark to Nude Mark and even Psycho Serial Killer Mark, Spencer has tremendous fun with his hapless lead protagonist, who compulsively visits his other selves until falling for sultry Deadender Claire, who only believes in a singular existence. In its exploration of identity and culture, *The Infinite Vacation* brings to mind Ray Bradbury's classic *Fahrenheit 451* as much as Philip K Dick's mind-bending dystopias, with some added ultra-violence. Intercut with fumetti-style photo sequences and text pieces, Christian Ward's vivid, painterly art perfectly captures the endless possibilities of the future world. Now if only he and Spencer can find a parallel dimension, where *The Infinite Vacation* ships on a regular basis, everything will be well with the world.

If you're too squeamish for *The Infinite Vacation*'s more gratuitous scenes then you better steer clear of *The Strange Talent Of Luther Strode*. Like an X-rated *Superior*, Justin Jordan places a contemporary spin on the familiar tale of a bespectacled nerd, who is transformed a little too rapidly into a muscle-bound hunk after purchasing a Charles Atlas-style illustrated manual. Like John Woo helming *Glee*, Jordan meshes the standard tropes of an archetypal American school melodrama with the foreboding atmosphere of a dark superhero epic, creating an affectionate chemistry between Luther and those closest to him, namely his mother, best pal Felipe and potential squeeze Petra. Content to lurk in the background, sinister villain the Librarian finally makes his presence felt in #4, which ends in a heartfelt cliffhanger that will leave you hankering for the next issue.

> **“Painterly art perfectly captures the future world”**

Grifter scribe Nathan Edmondson's *Who Is Jack Ellis?* was one of last year's sleeper successes. Centring on a special ops espionage team who tackle the jobs even the CIA won't touch, it's hard to envision *The Activity* gaining the same momentum. Favouring self-contained stories as opposed to an over-arching plot, Edmondson switches rapidly between time periods in *#1*'s 'Fiddler on the Roof', as the team meets new recruit Leslie Ryan and farewells a deceased colleague. With Mitch Gerads' moody art evocatively capturing the seedy locales, there's a subdued quality to Edmondson's gritty scenarios that is more *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* than *Spooks*. However, the cast never really rises above their nondescript codenames, while team leader Weatherman's English accent in *#2*'s 'Silent Night' is as lamentable as Don Cheadle's Cockney twang in *Ocean's Eleven*. Bloody good evening indeed, chaps! **Stephen Jewell**

NEW 52 OMNIBUS

WRITERS: Various
ARTISTS: Various
PUBLISHER: DC
OUT: Now
★★★

A queer beast, this. On the one hand, you can see why DC might want to produce a hardcover omnibus of all the first issues of its New 52 initiative. The relaunch was a marketing triumph, and a critical and sales success to boot. The publisher has every right to wish to celebrate and commemorate its bold, risky move.

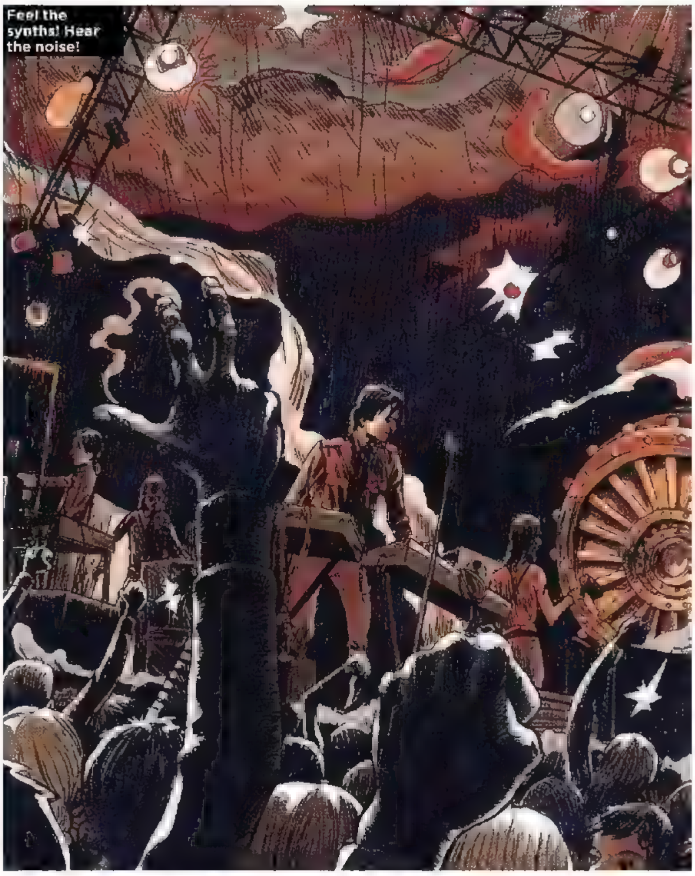
On the other hand, what's to be gained from reading 52 separate issue #1s on the trot? That's 52 opening chapters, 52 cliffhanger endings and 52 pieces of unfinished business. No question, there are some superb individual comics on offer, and even the less immediately engaging titles are great. As a sampler, albeit a pricy one, it just about works. The collection also shows off the firm editorial vision behind the project. DC didn't simply hit the reset button, it cherry-picked the best bits of existing DCU continuity and folded them in together with some innovations. This was no *Crisis*. Babies were not thrown out with the bath water.

> **“ Readers would be better off going for the originals ”**

The book's main drawback is purely practical. Clocking in at over 1,000 pages, it just doesn't fall open properly. Text and images get lost in the deep, steep valley between recto and verso, which sometimes makes reading difficult and ruins the effect of spreads. Readers would be better off going for the original floppies, which aren't hard to find, or else waiting for the altogether-less-unwieldy series trades. **James Lovegrove**

OF COURSE HE'S NOT! Sheesh.

A-MAN?
YOU OKAY?



Feel the synths! Hear the noise!

ONE MODEL NATION

WRITER: Courtney Taylor-Taylor
ARTIST: Jim Rugg
PUBLISHER: Titan
OUT: Now
★★★★

ONE MODEL NATION

Music and comics have long enjoyed a close kinship – see Tom Morello's *Orchid* for another contemporary example of rock star turned comic writer – and Courtney Taylor-Taylor of The Dandy Warhols is the latest to bridge the two mediums. And with some style, too.

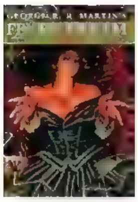
He's expertly weaved fiction into reality – the reality of Berlin in the '70s, where the titular art rock band One Model Nation become embroiled in the Baader-Meinhof movement and the fractious political nature of the period. Taylor crafts an expert blend, but what's even more impressive than his sense of style, time and place is how sympathetic he is to how comics work.

He's plainly thought long and hard about the best way to present his message using words and pictures, and the result is something that's been allowed room to breathe; his story told through character and expression rather than plot and exposition. Brilliantly, gigs and music come alive simply through images; there are no 'sound effects'. Your brain fills in the sonic gaps, and the effect is both strangely touching and oddly thrilling.

Jim Rugg's artwork, at once cartoonish and serious, nails the tone of the period and the look of the scene exquisitely. (Mike Allred also offers a splendid rendition of David Bowie, who slips effortlessly into Rugg's scenes.) A thorough and charming afterword from Taylor tops off a compelling and subtle package. **Jes Bickham**

FEVRE DREAM

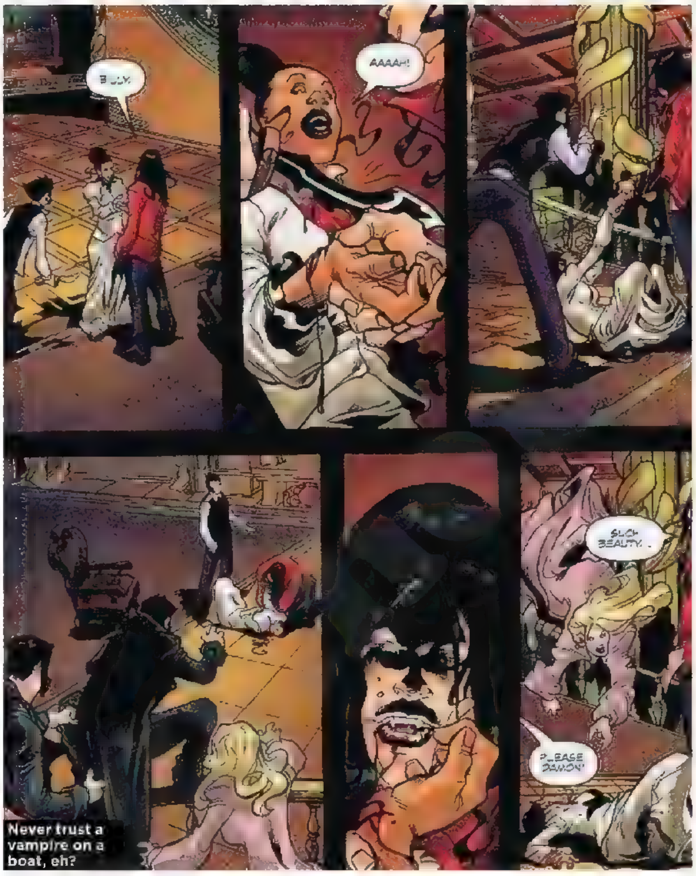
WRITER: Daniel Abraham (from the book by George RR Martin)
ARTIST: Rafa Lopez
PUBLISHER: Avatar/Titan
OUT: Now
★★★☆☆


GEORGE R.R. MARTIN'S
FEVRE DREAM

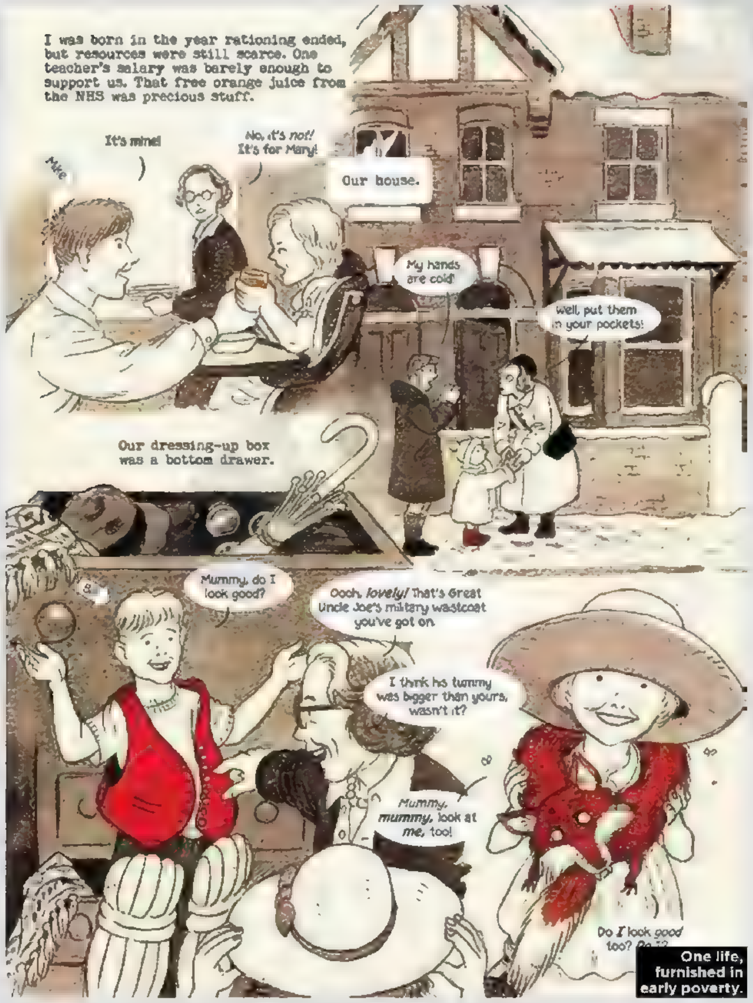
George RR Martin is almost certainly best known at the moment for *Game Of Thrones*. But that terrific TV series (and the exquisite *Song Of Ice And Fire* book sequence that informs it) is by no means all we have to thank him for. He wrote for the *Beauty And The Beast* TV series, he oversaw the development of *Wild Cards*, and he wrote *Fevre Dream*, a 1982 novel that is a rarity in the horror genre, in that its high concept is vampires aboard a 19th century paddle steamer.

It's a terrific book, dripping with atmosphere and memorable characters, and this adaptation by Dark Horse sadly doesn't quite manage to capture its full majesty. The broad strokes of the story are dealt with efficiently: Captain Abner Marsh is approached by the mysterious Joshua York, and together they build and launch a majestic new steamship, the Fevre Dream. Unbeknownst to Marsh, though, York is a vampire, committed to slaying others of his kind and, needless to say, complications arise...

The main problem is Lopez's art, which is a ludicrous thing to say, as it's plainly fantastic. His style, though, doesn't seem to gel with the subject matter and, on occasions, faces aren't distinguishable enough, leading to some confusion as to who's who. There's also the problem that some characters – like the foul Sour Billy Tipton – don't come to life as they do in the book, and that's especially true for Abner Marsh, never as phenomenally ugly as he's described, but nonetheless as noble as he should be. A good effort, but not quite great. **Jes Bickham**


BILLY.
AAAAH!
SUCH BEAUTY...
PLEASE DAMON!

Never trust a vampire on a boat, eh?


I was born in the year rationing ended, but resources were still scarce. One teacher's salary was barely enough to support us. That free orange juice from the NHS was precious stuff.
It's mine!
No, it's not! It's for Mary!
Our house.
My hands are cold!
Well, put them in your pockets!
Our dressing-up box was a bottom drawer.
Mummy, do I look good?
Oooh, lovely! That's Great Uncle Joe's military waistcoat you've got on.
I think his tummy was bigger than yours, wasn't it?
Mummy, mummy, look at me, too!
Do I look good too? Do I?

One life, furnished in early poverty.

DOTTER OF HER FATHER'S EYES

WRITER: Mary M Talbot
ARTIST: Bryan Talbot
PUBLISHER: Jonathan Cape
OUT: Now
★★★★★

Dotter of her Father's Eyes
Mary M Talbot
Bryan Talbot

The peerless Bryan Talbot's latest book is written by his wife, Mary, and proves that the Talbot name must be some kind of gateway to sequential art brilliance, for *Dotter Of Her Father's Eyes* is beguiling and heartbreaking stuff.

Mary Talbot's father, James S Atherton, was an eminent Joycean scholar, and *Dotter* is an account of both Mary's life and that of Lucia, James Joyce's own daughter. There are parallels everywhere, not least in the form of problematic parents (Mary's angry father; Lucia's bitter mother). The lives of both women – one sepia-toned, the other rendered in cold blues – are framed in modern-day sequences which feature both of the Talbots.

Part memoir, part biography, part history lesson, the story is told in a straightforward manner that belies the emotional churn that tosses us all from day to day.

The effect is startling, and magnifies the wonder and tragedy of the events herein. In particular, the simple, sweet section that recalls the Talbots' wedding pushes the heart towards the throat; later, when Mary's father passes away, the line, "And, as none of us lives happily ever after, the time came when we buried him," leaps out of nowhere to devastate us.

> **“ Part memoir, part biography, part history lesson... ”**

Exquisitely written and gorgeously illustrated, this small, personal tale contains whole worlds of wonder and heartache. A triumph. **Jes Bickham**

MYSTERY MEN

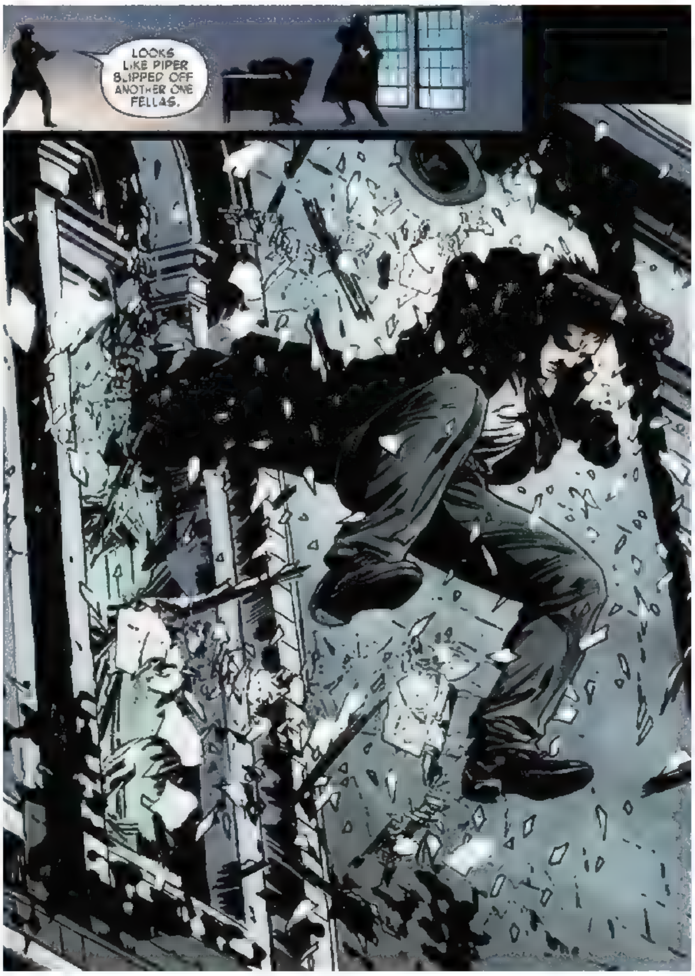
WRITER: David Liss
ARTIST: Patrick Zircher
PUBLISHER: Marvel
OUT: Now
★★★★

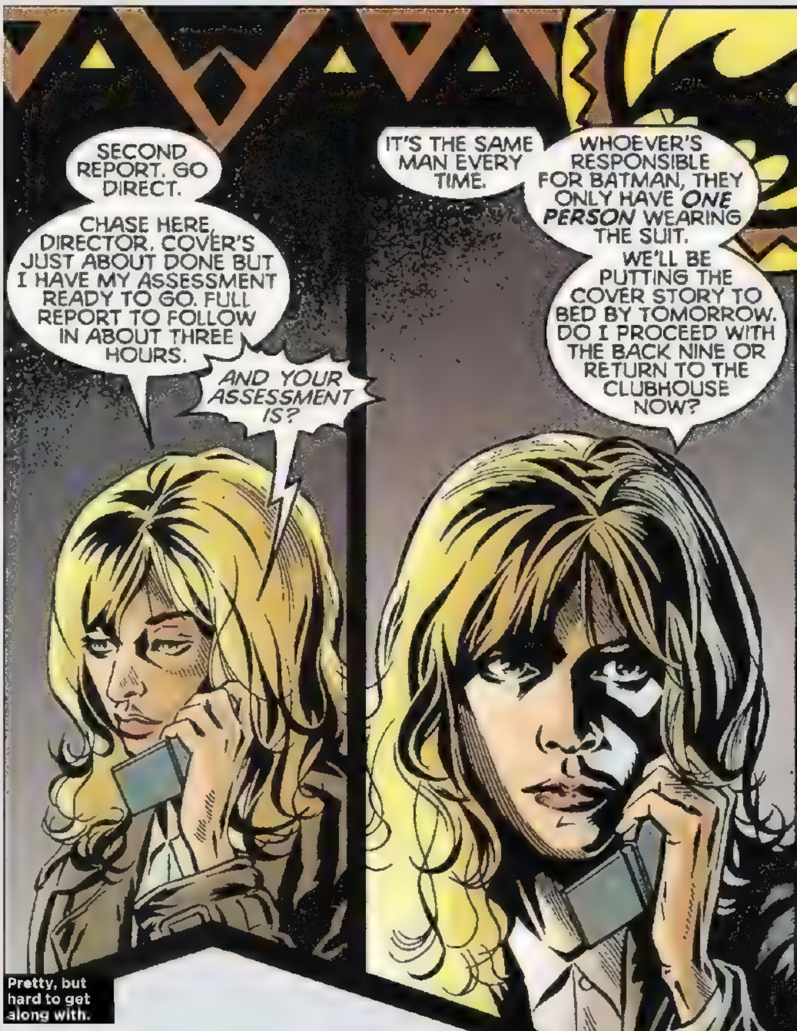
Marvel's policy of letting established thriller novelists loose on its characters has paid dividends. Writers such as Jonathan Maberry and Victor Gischler have brought a noirish, visceral edge to the Marvel Universe. The same is true of David Liss with his ongoing work on *Black Panther, The Man Without Fear* and this, *Mystery Men*, a five-part miniseries set way back in the early '30s.

It's a neat bit of retconning, establishing five new pre-war superheroes who conform to the archetypes of Golden Age pulp fiction heroes – the masked crimefighter, the rocket-pack flyer, the superman, the conjuror, the sinister psychopath – but in each case with a significant twist. Liss explores the racial and sexual politics of the era while also providing a nicely knotty plot full of character moments and unexpected reversals. Patrick Zircher doesn't put a foot wrong with his sleek, detailed art.

One might argue that *Mystery Men* pays only lip service to Marvel continuity. Shorn of glancing references to the *Daily Bugle*, the Stark family and Baron Zemo, it could easily be a standalone indie book. It isn't quite as deeply and reverentially embedded as, say, Jonathan Hickman's *S.H.I.E.L.D*, but really, none of this matters. It's hugely enjoyable nonetheless and, with the door left wide open for a sequel, more of the same would be very welcome. **James Lovegrove**

> **❝ A nicely knotty plot full of character moments ❞**


LOOKS LIKE PIPER SLIPPED OFF ANOTHER ONE FELLAS.


SECOND REPORT. GO DIRECT.
CHASE HERE, DIRECTOR. COVER'S JUST ABOUT DONE BUT I HAVE MY ASSESSMENT READY TO GO. FULL REPORT TO FOLLOW IN ABOUT THREE HOURS.
AND YOUR ASSESSMENT IS?
IT'S THE SAME MAN EVERY TIME.
WHOEVER'S RESPONSIBLE FOR BATMAN, THEY ONLY HAVE *ONE PERSON* WEARING THE SUIT.
WE'LL BE PUTTING THE COVER STORY TO BED BY TOMORROW. DO I PROCEED WITH THE BACK NINE OR RETURN TO THE CLUBHOUSE NOW?

Pretty, but hard to get along with.

CHASE

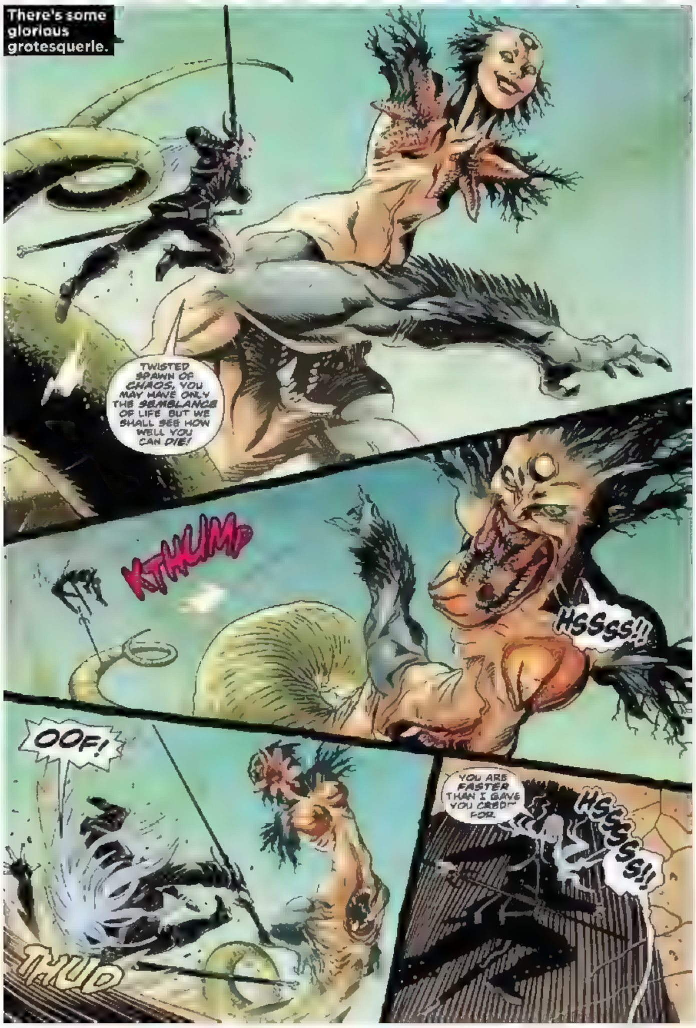
WRITER: Dan Curtis Johnson
ARTIST: JH Williams III
PUBLISHER: DC
OUT: Now
★★★★

The main attraction of *Chase* – indeed, the likely reason DC has chosen to trade-paperback this turn-of-the-millennium series now – is the artwork by JH Williams III. It's not fully formed here and hasn't yet achieved the sublime heights that it would later in *Promethea* and, more recently, the glorious *Batwoman*, but it's still a thing of beauty and a joy to behold.

Williams co-plots with scripter Dan Curtis Johnson, and together they relate the exploits of Cameron Chase, an agent with the Department of Extranormal Operations. The DEO deals with the mess left behind in the DCU – the aftermath of superhuman battles, the fallout from alien invasions, the property damage and so forth. Chase herself hates anything to do with super powers, which is ironic, as one of the story's twists is that she appears to be developing one of her own.

She also has boyfriend trouble and an all-round bad attitude. She's conflicted and defiantly unsympathetic, which makes her unusual and interesting – and is, in all probability, the reason why readers didn't warm to the comic and it was cancelled after 10 issues. It's a real shame but if you're after something a little bit different – and want to see the early flowering of an immense talent – this TPB is essential stuff. **James Lovegrove**

> **❝ She has boyfriend trouble and a bad attitude ❞**


There's some glorious grotesquerie.
TWISTED SPAWN OF CHAOS, YOU MAY HAVE ONLY THE SEMBLANCE OF LIFE BUT WE SHALL SEE HOW WELL YOU CAN DIE!
KTHUMP
HSSSS!!
OOF!
YOU ARE FASTER THAN I GAVE YOU CREDIT FOR
HSSSSS!!
THUD

ELRIC: THE BALANCE LOST

WRITER: Chris Roberson
ARTIST: Francesco Biagini
PUBLISHER: Boom! Studios
OUT: Now
★★★★★

Comics interpretations of Michael Moorcock's fiction tend to be a little disappointing, failing to capture the undercurrent of irony and ennui that bubbles beneath the novels' gaudy fantasy trappings. The *Elric* adaptations published by Pacific Comics, First Comics and Marvel's Epic imprint in the early '80s were laudable but a little dull, only really coming to life whenever graced by the stunningly gorgeous and phantasmagorical art of P Craig Russell.

Happy to say, then, that Boom! Studios' *Elric: The Balance Lost* is a top-notch piece of Moorcockia. The great man himself isn't directly involved, but writer Chris Roberson and artist Francesco Biagini absolutely evoke the spirit and tone of his books.

The title, in fact, is something of a misnomer, since the Albino Prince is only one part of the equation. Other major characters from the Moorcock multiverse – Dorian Hawkmoon and Corum, for instance – share equal prominence in the plot, as once again the fragile equilibrium between the forces of Order and Chaos is imperilled. To put it another way: "Yay! A team-up!"

Roberson has a firm grasp of what makes Moorcock's work tick, and Biagini revels in the outlandish scenery and situations he's called upon to draw.

Whether you're a long-time fan of the fantasy novels or a complete newbie to the Moorcock macrocosm, there's much to savour here. **James Lovegrove**

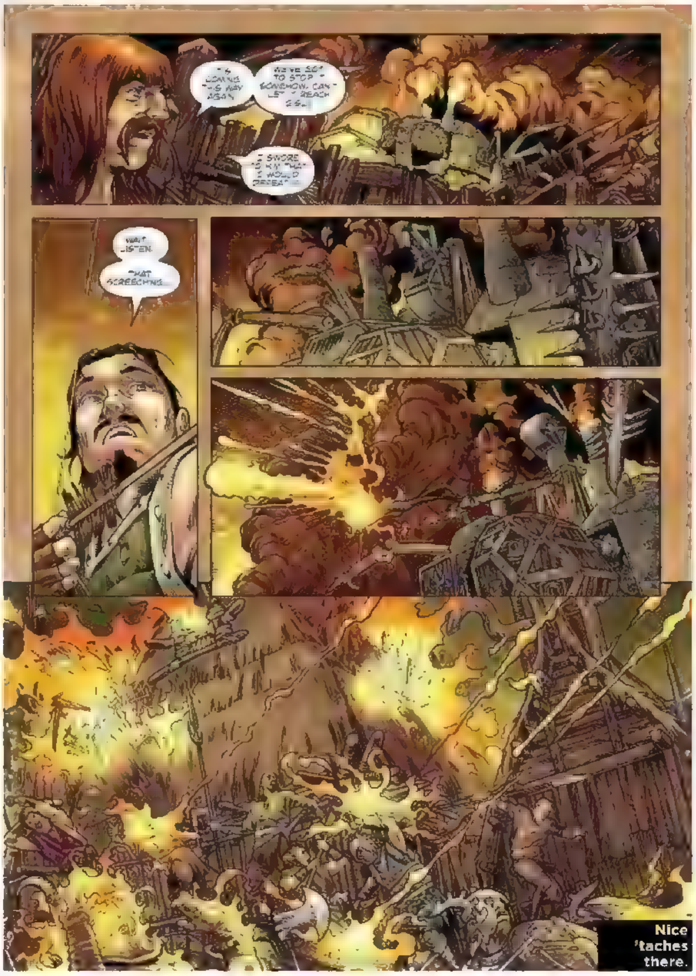
WOLFSKIN: HUNDREDTH DREAM

WRITER: Mike Wolfer
ARTIST: Gianluca Pagliarani
PUBLISHER: Avatar
OUT: Now
★★★★

Warren Ellis co-wrote the first *Wolfskin* miniseries with Mike Wolfer. Here, with the second, he takes only a story credit, leaving Wolfer to do the heavy lifting, script-wise. Since it's based on an outline Ellis wrote for a standalone graphic novel, however, his fingerprints are all over the project.

The story, set in a time before recorded history, centres on five assorted, mismatched adventurers who band together in order to defend a village from attack by monstrous mysterious forces… No, wait! Come back! Before you allow yourself to think that this is just another retread of that hoary old fantasy plot, rest assured that nothing is as it seems and the five heroes are anything but walking clichés. The mage of the group, for instance, suffers from self-esteem issues and performance anxiety, while the barbarian, the Wolfskin of the title, is a drug-taking Northman whose berserker rages make Wolverine's seem like kindergarten outings by comparison. There's also a nice Tolkienesque resonance in the book's depiction of a world where magic and belief are slowly, inexorably being crushed under the heavy-booted march of knowledge and science, the supernatural conceding to progress.

'Vikingpunk' is the coinage we're going to go with on this one. Or, if you prefer, 'sword and technology'. Either way, dig in. You won't be disappointed. **James Lovegrove**


Nice 'taches there.
WAIT. LISTEN.
THAT SCREECHING…

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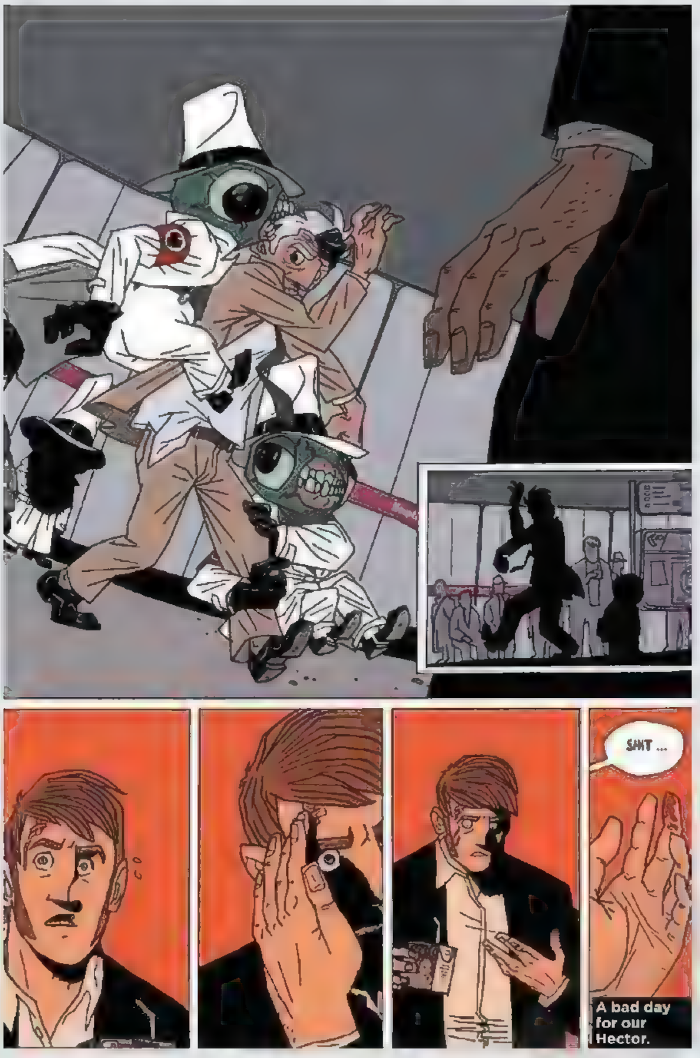


A bad day for our Hector.

HECTOR UMBRA

WRITER: Ulie Oesterle
ARTIST: Ulie Oesterle
PUBLISHER: Blank Slate
OUT: Now
★★★★

Originally serialised back in 2003, *Hector Umbra* has been translated from the original German and handsomely collected in a lavish hardback by Blank Slate. It's the kind of thing you'd expect from SelfMadeHero, and that's high praise indeed, because *Hector Umbra* is bloody good stuff.

It's a rich stew of genres, taking in aliens, ghosts, religious nutters, the nature of friendship and Munich clubbing. The eponymous Hector, a man who certainly drinks too much, is mourning the death of his friend, Joseph, when another member of his close-knit social group – DJ Osaka Best – disappears.

What follows is an odyssey through both Munich's nightlife and the afterlife as Hector unravels the conspiracy surrounding his friend's abduction, and confronts the peculiar (if not outright lunatic) creatures behind his adventure.

It's a glorious book, vividly written and rendered by Oesterle, who echoes Mike Mignola's chunky, expressive linework (perhaps fittingly, as Oesterle was, alongside Mignola, one of the creators featured in 2003's *The Dark Horse Book Of Hauntings*).

Alongside the weird and the wonderful there's a palpable sense of melancholy, and a touching exploration of male friendship. (There's some romance, too, but it definitely takes a back seat to bromance.)

> **“It's a glorious book, vividly written and rendered”**

Touchstones are hard to come by. There's a breath of *Hellblazer*, perhaps, in the use of nightlife and the supernatural, but Oesterle has cut his story from whole cloth; *Hector Umbra* is unique, a heady brew that is surely simply a result of Oesterle's own fascinations and passions. It's about as far removed from contemporary superheroics as you can get, and shows us the extraordinary breadth of comics to boot. **Jes Bickham**

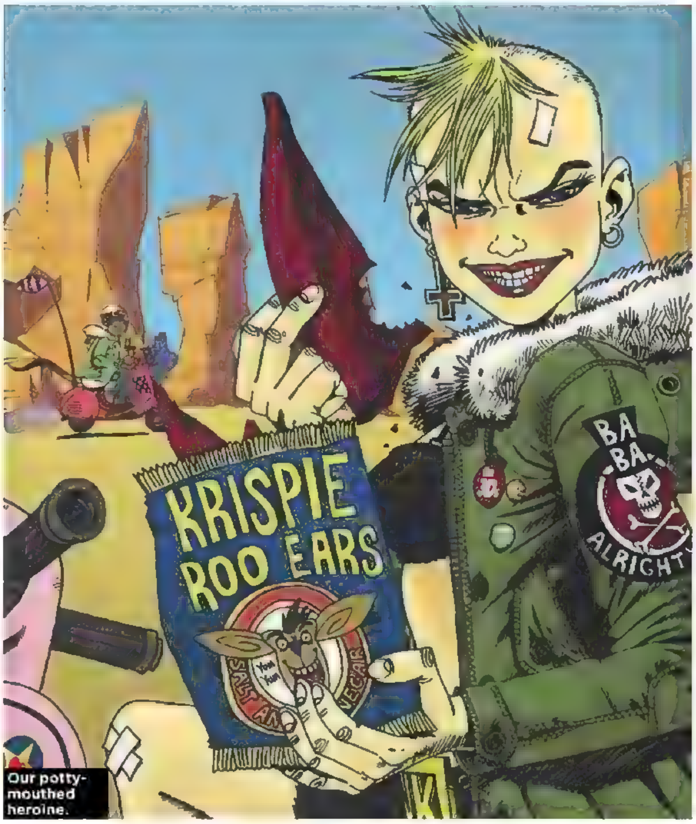
TANK GIRL
BAD WIND RISING

WRITER: Alan Martin
ARTIST: Rufus Dayglo
PUBLISHER: Titan
OUT: Now
★★★★

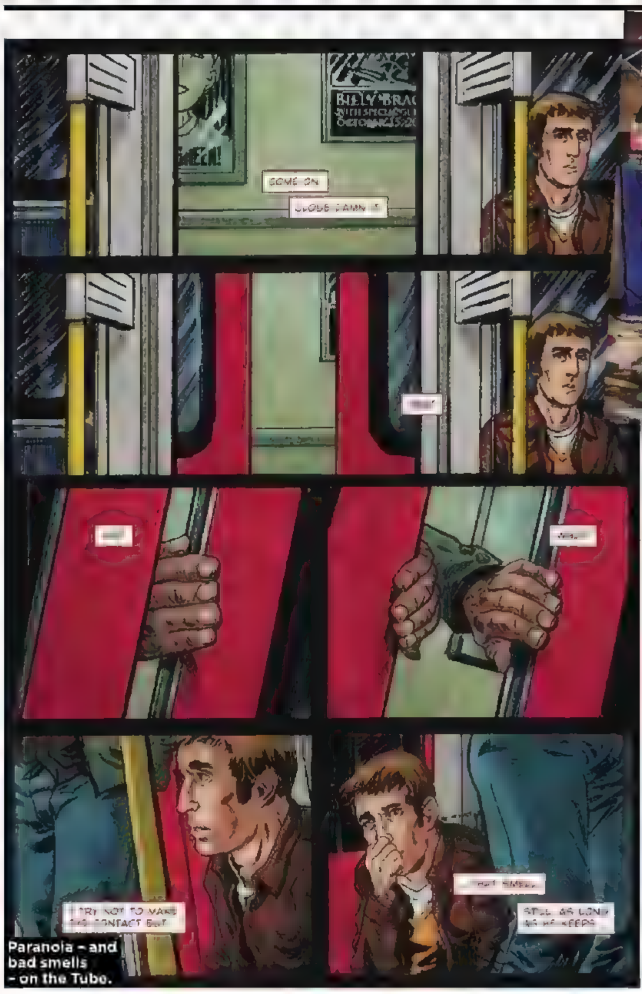
While some may sniff that *Tank Girl*'s never been quite the same without original crayon Jamie Hewlett, we disagree. In this, the eighth series with art 'newcomer' (we use the term sardonically) Rufus Dayglo, *Tank Girl*'s going as strong as ever, full of gleeful profanity and more than enough bollock-shootings, with art stuffed full of violent expression and surreal details. What's not to love? Very little.

The premise is that Tank Girl and upright Kangaroo lover Booga go on holiday and fall out – as you do. Hippies are then met, James Bond-esque bartenders are joined for mid-air escapades, boobs are exposed, muesli is eaten and our lovers' tiff is revealed to have been engineered for the purposes of turning on the world's first time machine (of course) – with the help of the 'Large Hardon Collider'. It's that kind of comic.

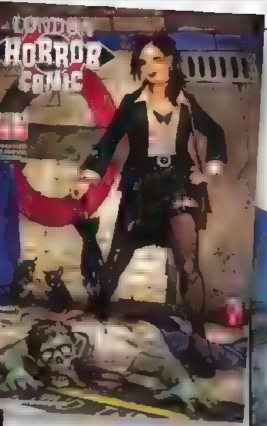
Tank Girl: Bad Wind Rising won't helpfully illuminate a shadowy portion of the human soul, or deal in themes more refined works of literature may tackle, but that doesn't matter one jot nor tittle. It's hilarious, enthusiastic fun and full of inventive, freewheeling good (and salty) humour. And any comic that contains the line, "I'm supposed to be on holiday, yet here I am throwing dog shit at policemen," has got to be doing something right. More soon, please. **Jes Bickham**

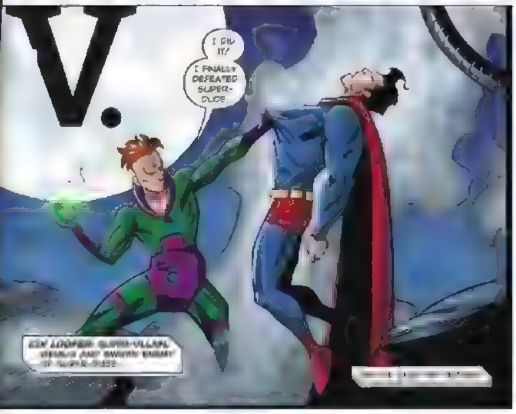


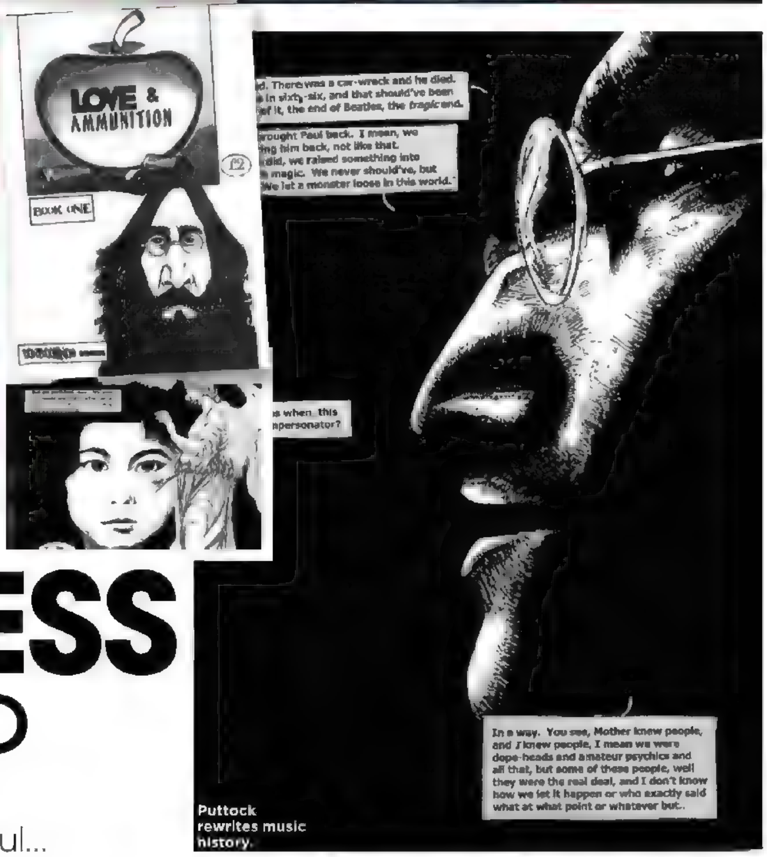
Our potty-mouthed heroine.


COME ON
THAT SMELL
STILL AS LONG AS HE KEEPS

Paranoia – and bad smells – on the Tube.


LONDON HORROR COMIC


V.
I DID IT!
I FINALLY DEFEATED SUPER-DUDE


LOVE & AMMUNITION
BOOK ONE
£2
…d. There was a car-wreck and he died. …in sixty-six, and that should've been …of it, the end of Beatles, the tragic end.
…rought Paul back. I mean, we …ing him back, not like that. …did, we raised something into …magic. We never should've, but …We let a monster loose in this world.
In a way. You see, Mother knew people, and I knew people, I mean we were dope-heads and amateur psychics and all that, but some of these people, well they were the real deal, and I don't know how we let it happen or who exactly said what at what point or whatever but..

Puttock rewrites music history.

SMALL PRESS ROUND-UP

Because sometimes small really is beautiful...

London Horror Comic
WRITER: John-Paul Kamath
ARTISTS: Lee Ferguson, Dean Kotz
OUT: Now
★★★½

Love & Ammunition
WRITER AND ARTIST: Grayham P Puttock
OUT: Now
★★★½

Twisted Dark
WRITER AND ARTIST: Neil Gibson
OUT: Now
★★★★½

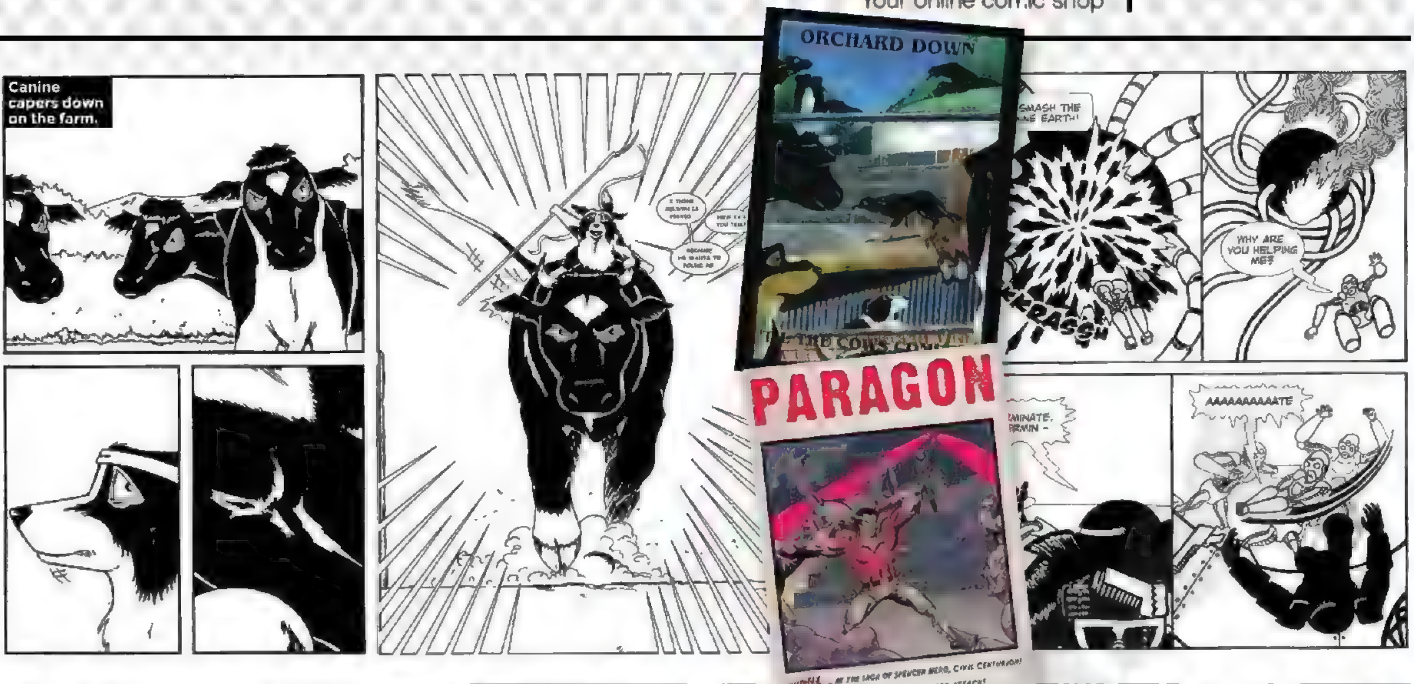
Orchard Down: Til The Cows Come Home
WRITER AND ARTIST: RC Bayliss
OUT: Now
★★★½

Paragon
WRITERS: Matthew McLaughlin, Greg Meldrum, Dirk Van Dom, Alan Holloway
ARTISTS: Dave Candlish, Stephen Prestwood, Louis Carter, James Corcoran, David Broughton
OUT: Now
★★★★½

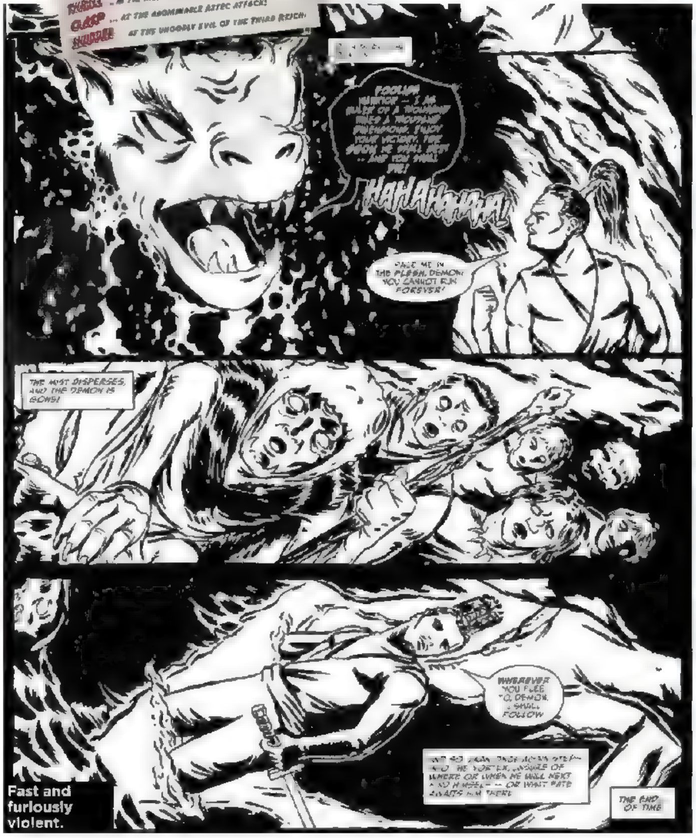
As anyone who has drunkenly wandered the streets of Soho at 2am and found themselves propositioned by a beautiful woman with suspiciously strong wrists will tell you, London can be a scary place. John-Paul Kamath is so enamoured with the capital's sinister side that he dedicated a whole anthology to it: the *London Horror Comic* (bit.ly/londonhorrorcomic). It's a strange beast, this one; great production values and some snappy writing bring the chills on in style, but at least two of these stories aren't based in London. We're not the sort of magazine that turns its nose up at a Superman spoof, but does it really have any place in a comic that sells itself on being a collection of London-based nastiness? Perhaps not, but aside from this deviation, *London Horror Comic* does a fine job of making the Underground an even more uncomfortable experience than it already is.

For some people, The Beatles were far more than a band. And Grayham P Puttock is clearly one of them, his Beatlemania manifesting itself in the pages of *Love & Ammunition*. Within these pages, John Lennon has morphed into a jungle-dwelling cult leader after the death of Yoko (at the hands of Velma from *Scooby Doo*, no less), Hunter S Thompson is on a mission for the truth and Paul McCartney very definitely died in 1966, unleashing a magical shitstorm. A wildly erratic book, there's nevertheless something charming about *Love & Ammunition*. Puttock has splurged his own twisted take on the Beatles mythos across every page, and it's hard to fault his energy, even if his pencils aren't the most consistent. Fans of the Fab Four will nod knowingly at every reference, and while everyone else might be a little confused, well, so what? Sometimes when you look

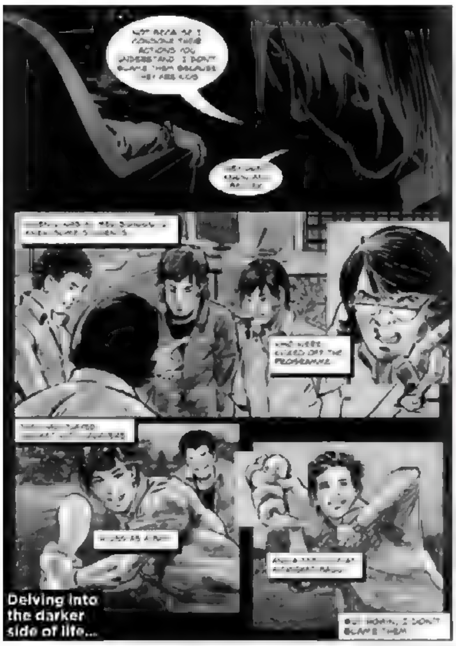
> “A chronicle of the dark and the dangerous”



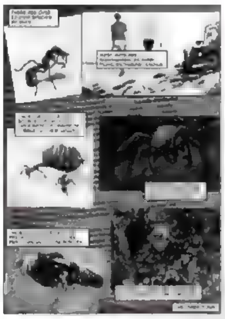
Canine capers down on the farm.

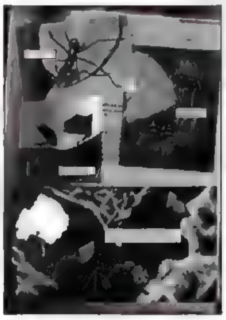

HAHAHAHAHA
THE MIST DISPERSES, AND THE DEMON IS GONE!
WHEREVER YOU FLEE ... SHALL FOLLOW
THE END OF TIME

Fast and furiously violent.



Delving into the darker side of life...





through a glass onion, the view is a little skewed.

Neil Gibson is not Mel Gibson. We know this because at the beginning of *Twisted Dark* (bit.ly/twisteddark), he's provided a handy comparison chart, providing a moment of levity before plunging the reader headfirst into a world populated by the suicidal, the murderous and the insane. Gibson's stories span the globe, his characters ranging from pre-teen girls to Columbian drug barons, and over the course of the 12 tales collected here he reveals himself to be an accomplished chronicler of the dark and dangerous. The artwork is crisp and expressive, and there's an impressive glut of ideas and imagination on show. His writing is gritty, nuanced and unafraid to dig deep into the uglier side of life, with convincing dialogue and sharp characterisation. He might not have the profile of Mel, but trust us, this Gibson is infinitely more interesting.

As you've already seen, some comic creators are obsessed with London, some with The Beatles and some with the black stains on the human soul. Others are just really, really into dogs. RC Bayliss loves his faithful friends so much he wrote a mammoth 150-page graphic novel about them. *Orchard Down* is essentially a love letter to simple country living, told through the eyes of five farm dogs as they try to milk cows, fight amongst themselves and chase tail in the most literal sense. Full of affection for his canine companions, Bayliss clearly loves drawing his pets, but unfortunately he's forgotten to come up with a compelling story for them.

If *Orchard Down* sits at the end of the comic spectrum marked 'gentle countryside larks', then *Paragon* (bit.ly/paragoncomic), an Eagle-nominated black-and-white anthology, occupies the space reserved for 'time and space-rupturing super-violence'. A large format comic that gives the berserk creations encountered within plenty of space to fold reality and lop off heads, there's a demented energy to *Paragon* that is impossible to dislike. The tales of Spencer Nero, a '30s superhero who fights Nazis and wrestles dangerous animals, and Jikan, a psychopathic time-travelling Ronin, are fired along at an exhilarating pace and held together by sheer audacity. The artwork is occasionally sloppy and some of the stories appear to have been put together so quickly that no one took the time to wonder what the hell was going on, but you're pulled along so quickly you barely notice. **Rob Power**

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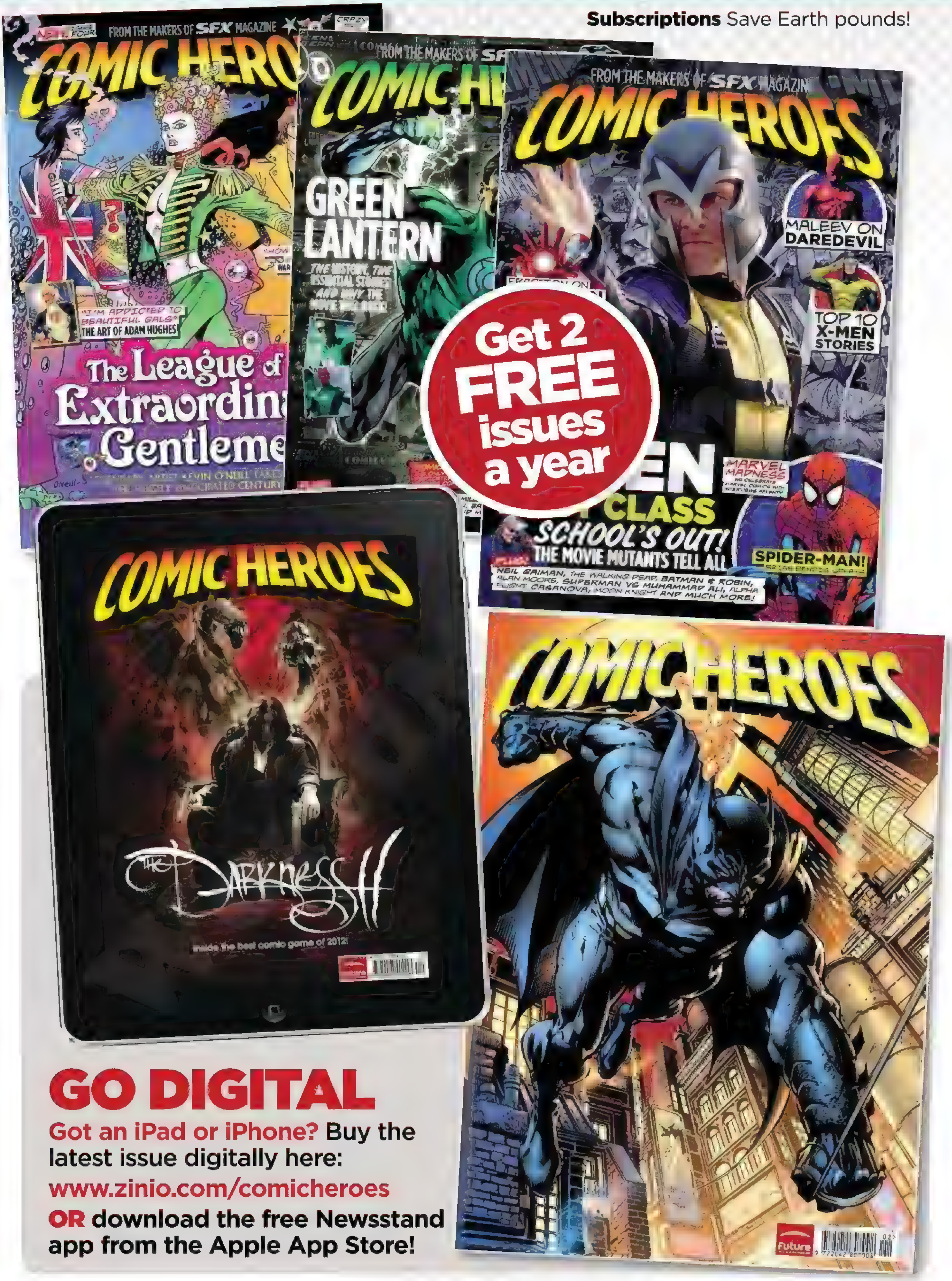
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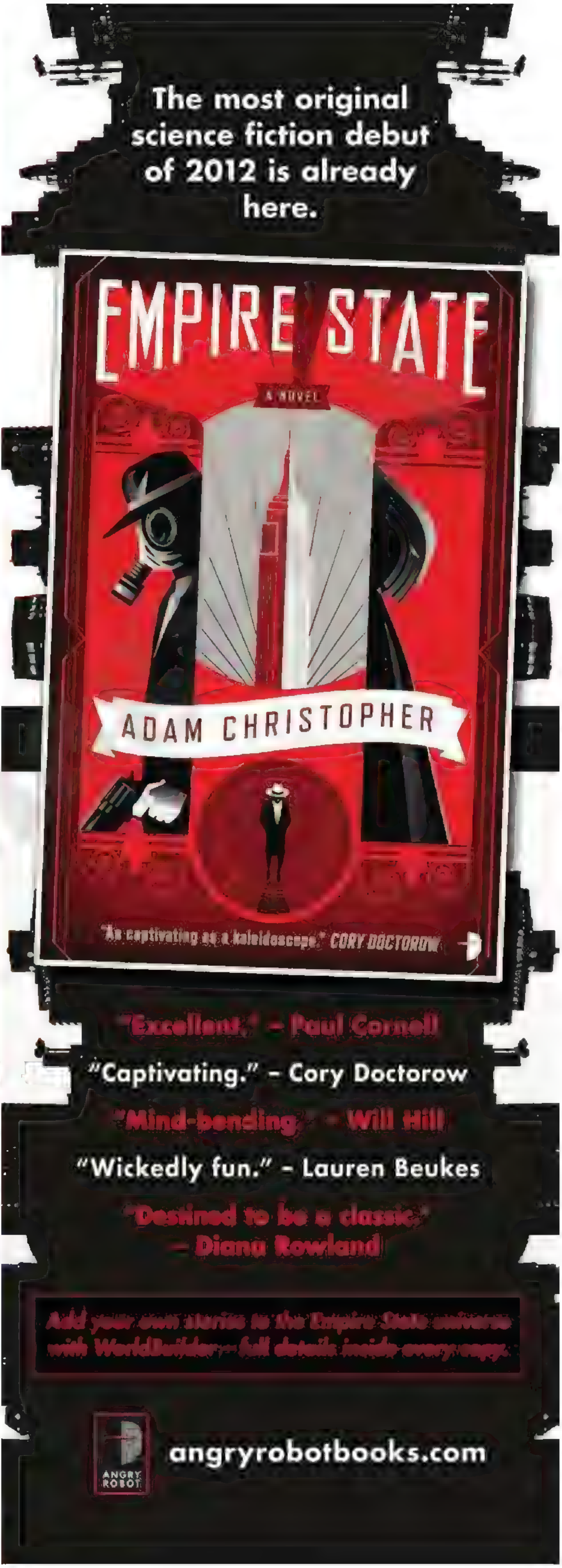
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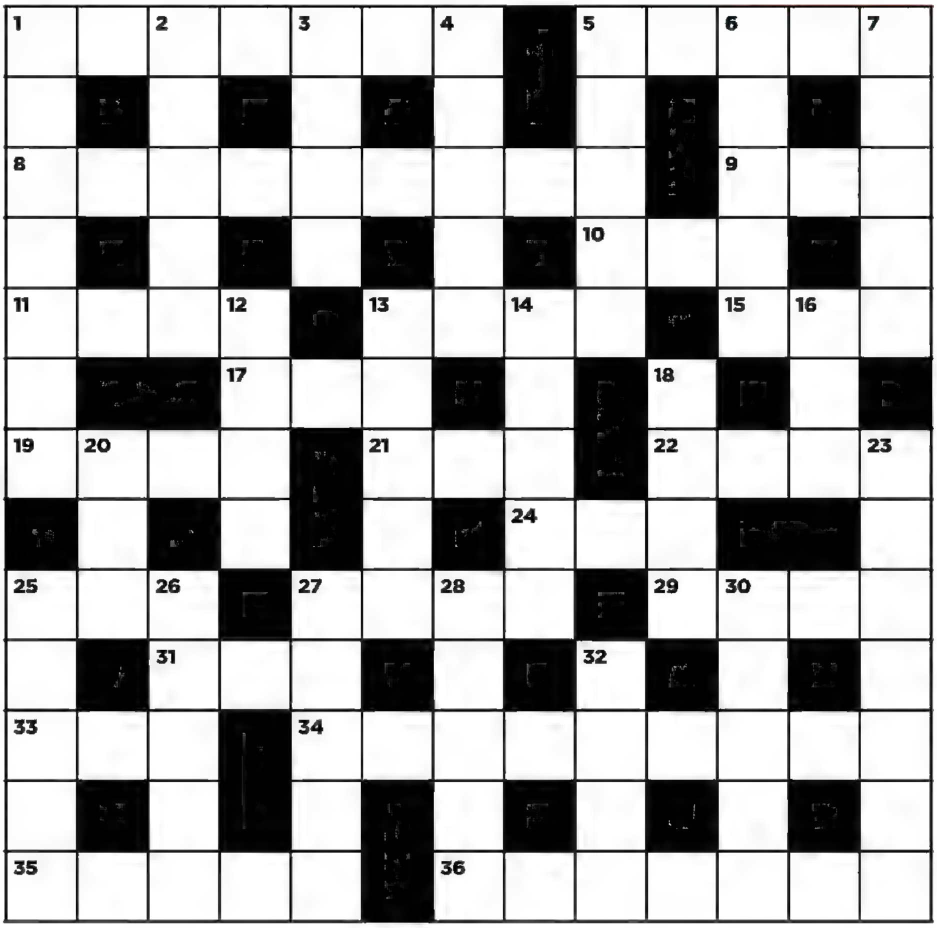

ACROSS

1 STRUMS COMETS

5 MYNAH COCK

8 Chris __________, who's written more issues of 22 Across than anyone (9)

9 *Barefoot* ___, Keiji Nakazawa's harrowing eyewitness account of the Hiroshima bombing (3)

10 Mrs Richards, or the murdered Mrs Dibny (3)

11 Elk runs backwards for the first name of Mr Fantastic (4)

13 Nickname of Fantastic Four pesterer the Impossible Man (4)

15 Stan ___, who wrote 22 Across in the early '60s, or Jim, who drew it in the early '90s (3)

17 Marvel techno-terrorist villain cabal, famous for their yellow jumpsuits and bucket-shaped headgear (3)

19 _____ Knight, Marvel's multiple-personality version of Batman, or manga heroine Sailor _____ (4)

21 ___ *Trucking Co., 2000 AD* strip from the '80s (3)

22 Theme team (4, hyphenated)

24 Elektra's preferred weapon (3)

25 Alan Moore's Numbers or Frank Miller's Guy (3)

27 Krypto, Streaky, Beppo and Comet – the Legion of Super-_____ (4)

29 Elijah _____, one third of *Planetary* (4)

31 Kryptonian sun god, or surname of geneticist recently introduced in 22 Across (3)

33 Al ___, Brazilian artist best known for his work on *Gen13* and *DV8* (3)

34 JOTS HATE MEWL

35 "Do you dare ______ ... the House of Mystery?" (5)

36 13 Down's Superman analogue (7)

DOWN

1 The late Dave ________, who pencilled memorable runs of 22 Across in the '70s and '80s (7)

2 Short-lived 1998 DC series about a government agent who handles costumed hero cases (5)

3 Teen Titan, real name Lilith Clay (4)

4 OR EURO MORON

5 ______ Braddock, twin sister of Captain Britain and member of 22 Across (5)

6 WORN TORN NIGHTWEAR

7 Delicate hue, such as a comicbook colourist might use (5)

12 _____ Whitman, alter ego of the current incarnation of the Black Knight (4)

13 Comics company founded by Todd McFarlane, Rob Liefeld, Marc Silvestri and others (5)

14 Axel _____button, vegetable-hating 'psychotic cyborg' created by Steve Moore and Curt Vile (5)

16 Brother ___, AI satellite that controls the OMACs (3)

18 "Okay _____ here we come!" – rallying cry of the Invaders (4)

20 Indie publisher, home of *Scott Pilgrim, Queen & Country, Courtney Crumrin* and others (3)

23 The Men From ________, 'agents of normalcy' in Grant Morrison's *Doom Patrol*, who speak in acronymic phrases (7)

25 John ______, writer/artist who shot to fame with his work on 22 Across (5)

26 Plant monster from outer space and now a Guardian of the Galaxy (5)

27 Pack and Man at Marvel, or Girl at DC (5)

28 ______ *To Astonish, From The Crypt*, or even *Of The Beanworld* (5)

30 1992 graphic novel by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean, *Signal To* ______ (5)

32 Muck-monster appearing at various different times in comics from Hillman Periodicals, Skywald and 13 Down (4)

James Lovegrove

I KNOW WHO THE FOURTH MAN IS

Planetary's Elijah ____. See 29 Across.

Across 1 Cyclops (SCOTT SUMMERS) 5 Beast (HANK MCCOY) 8 Claremont 9 Gen 10 Sue 11 Reed 13 Impy 15 Lee 17 A.I.M. 19 Moon 21 Ace 22 X-Men 24 Sai 25 Big 27 Pets 29 Snow 31 Rao 33 Rio 34 Wolverine (JAMES HOWLETT) 35 Enter 36 Supreme **Down** 1 Cockrum 2 Chase 3 Omen 4 Storm (ORORO MUNROE) 5 Betsy 6 Angel (WARREN WORTHINGTON) 7 Tinge 12 Dane 13 Image 14 Press 16 Eye 18 Axis 20 Oni 23 NOWHERE 25 Byrne 26 Groot 27 Power 28 Tales 30 Noise 32 Heap

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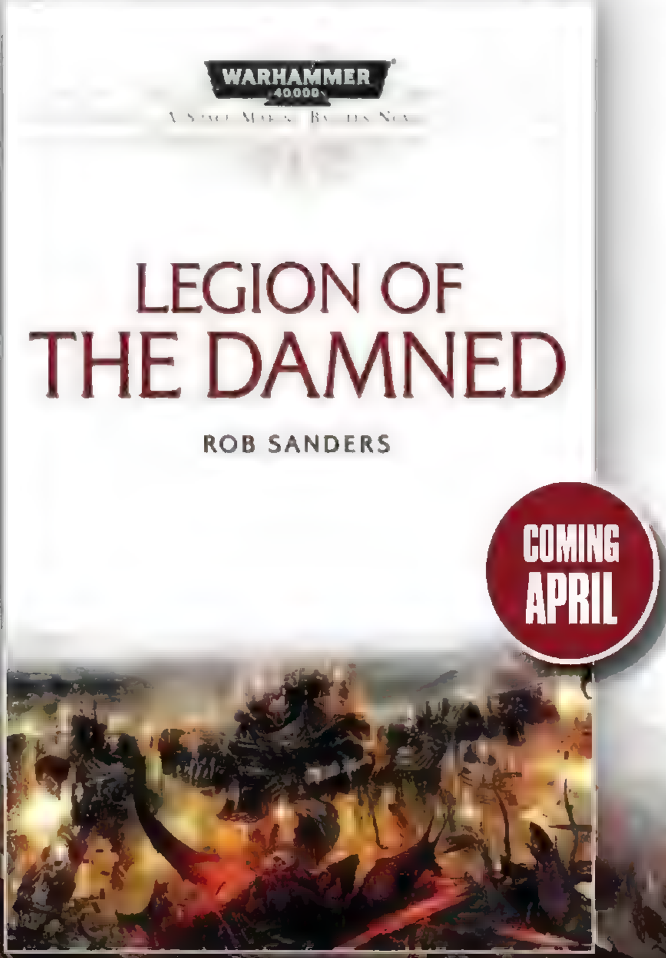
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PAG 3
JUDGE ANDERSON
THE PSI FILES VOLUME 02

JUDGE ANDERSON: GOLEM

A complete seven-page story from Alan Grant, culled from the forthcoming collection *Judge Anderson: The Psi Files 02*.
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Artist: Romero
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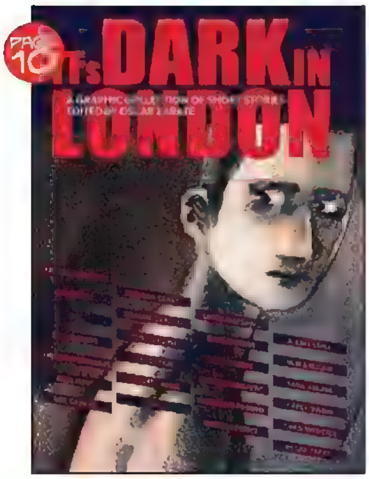
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IT'S DARK IN LONDON

THE GRIFFIN'S EGG

We are hugely proud to present this complete 10-page story from the forthcoming anthology *It's Dark In London*.
Writer: Iain Sinclair
Artist: Dave McKean
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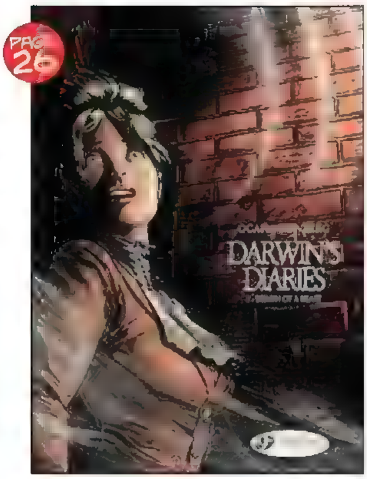
PAG 26
DARWIN'S DIARIES

DARWIN'S DIARIES

This extract is from part 2 of *Darwin's Diaries, Death of A Beast*, in which Charles Darwin reveals his monster-hunting side!
Writer: Runberg
Artist: Ocana
Publisher: Cinebook
Out: Now
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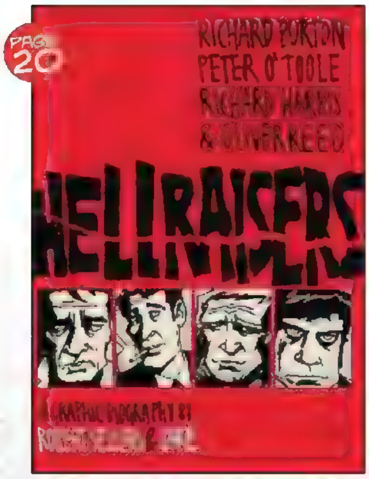
www.cinebook.co.uk


PAG 20
RICHARD BURTON
PETER O'TOOLE
RICHARD HARRIS
& OLIVER REED
HELLRAISERS

HELLRAISERS

The fictionalised exploits of Richard Burton, Peter O'Toole, Richard Harris and Oliver Reed, as they visit a young man drinking a bit too much...
Writer: Robert Sellers
Artist: Jake
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Out: Now
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www.selfmadehero.com

PAG 31
The Great Unwashed

THE GREAT UNWASHED

'Dead Souls' is an excerpt from the forthcoming *The Great Unwashed*, a collection of works by the Pleece Brothers.
Writers: Warren & Gary Pleece
Artists: Warren & Gary Pleece
Publisher: Escape Books
Out: 21 April
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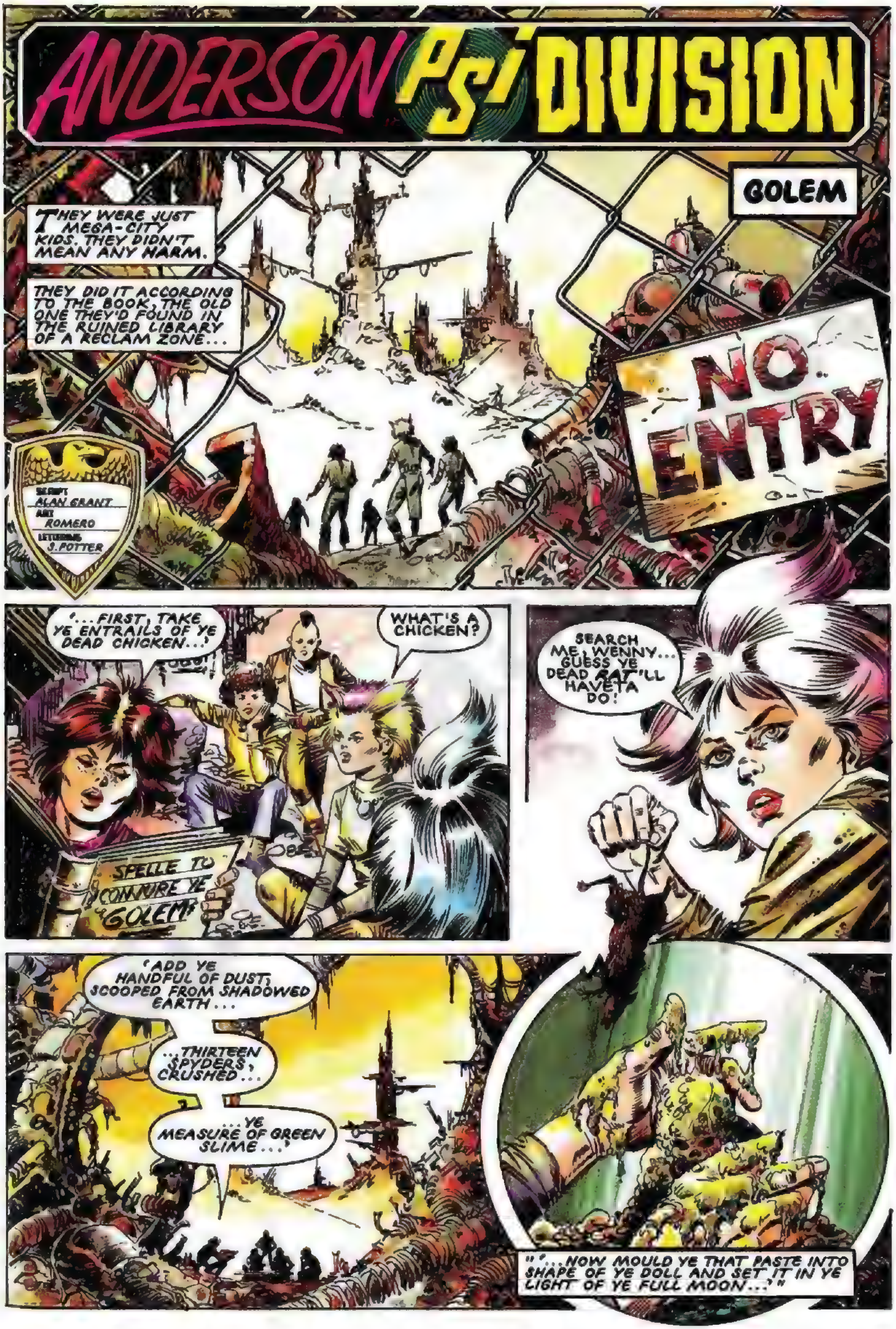
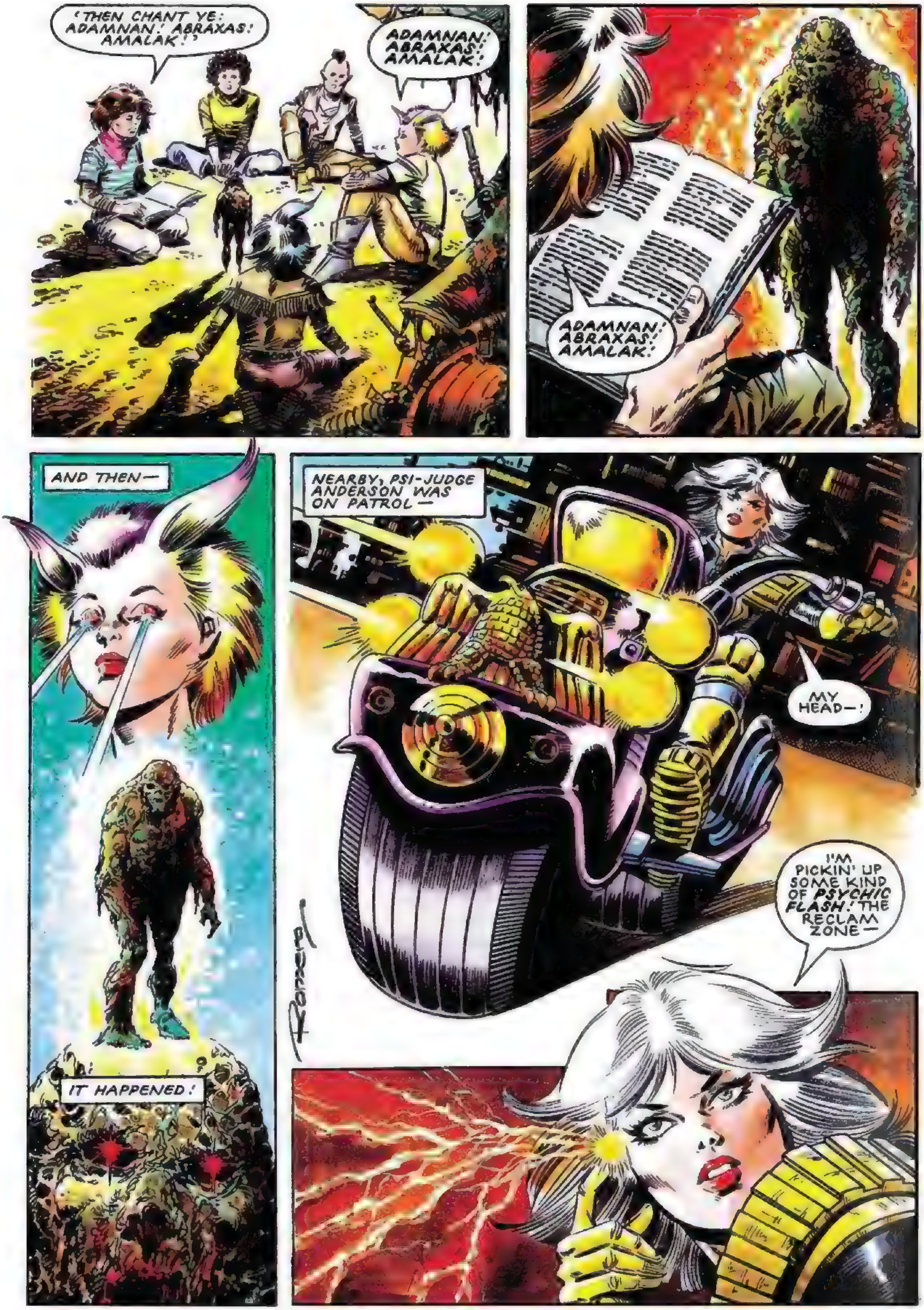
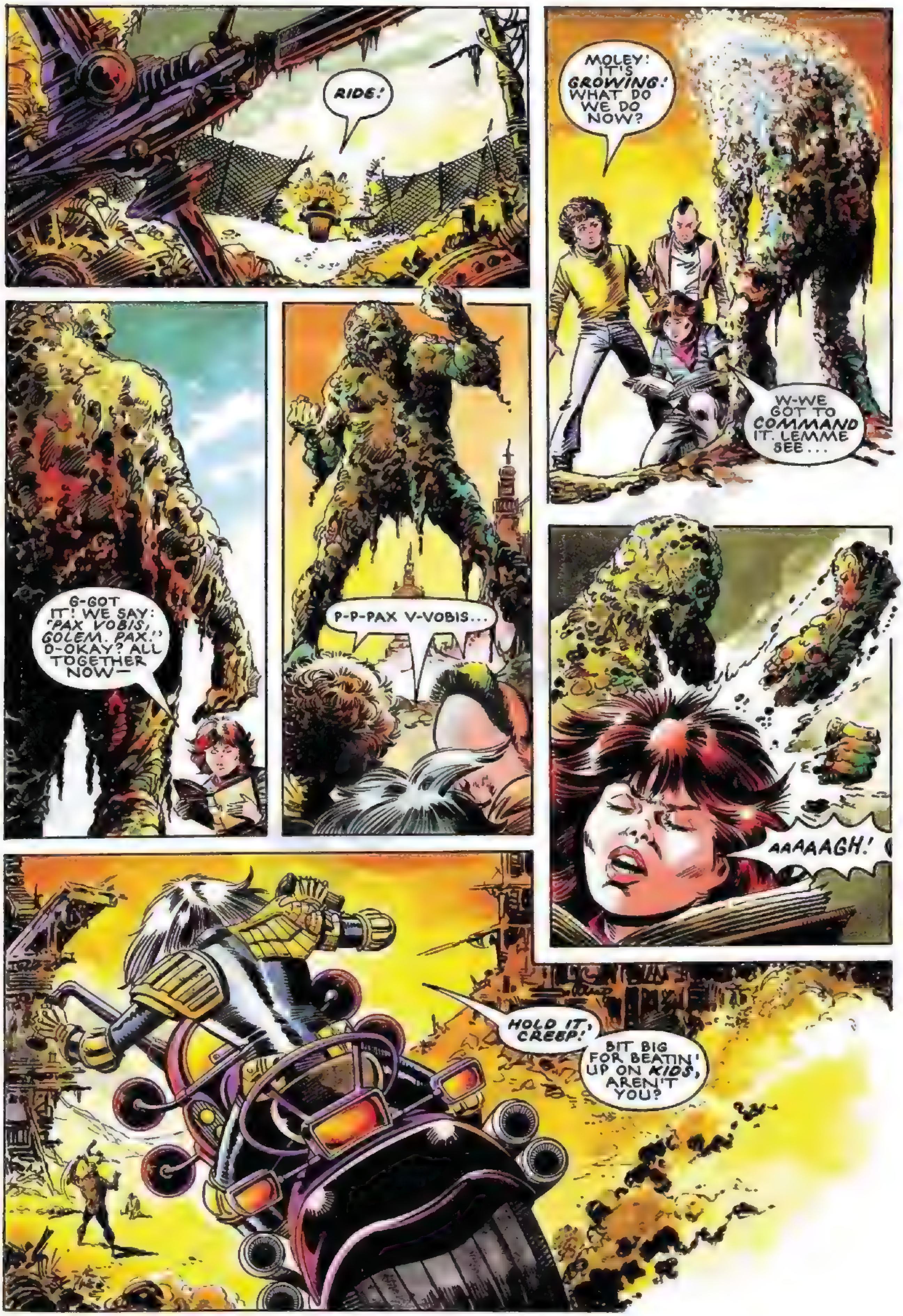
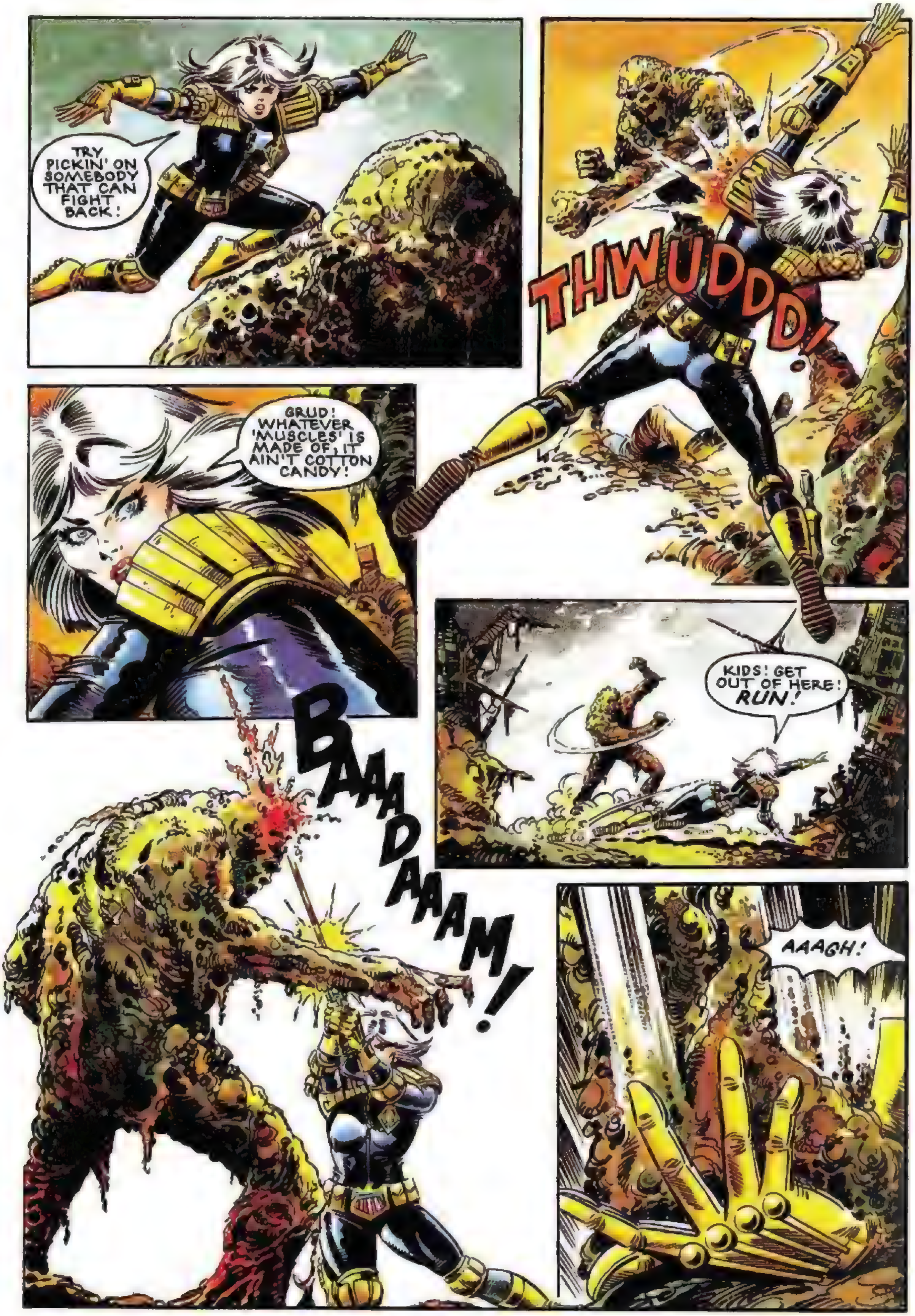
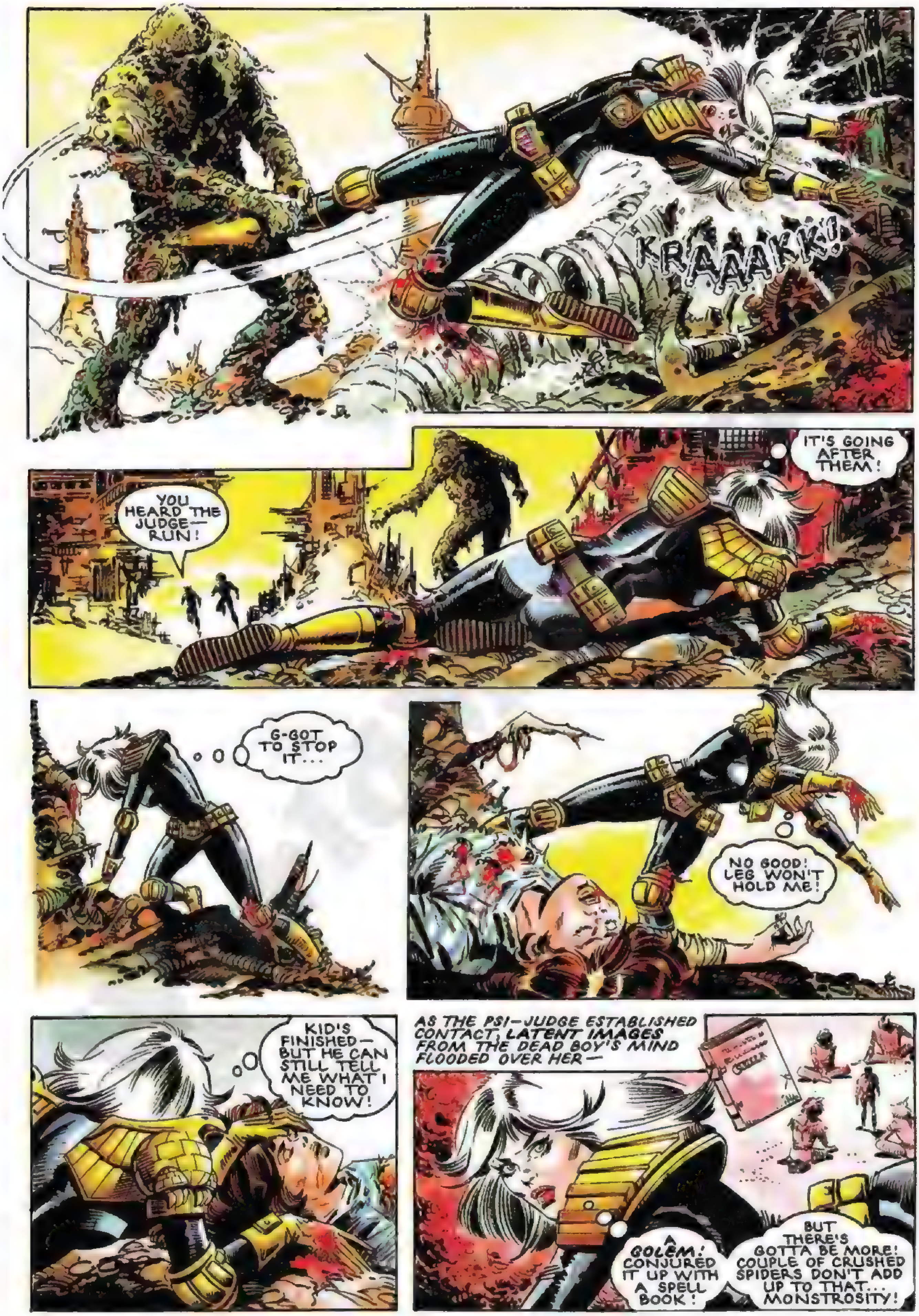
www.escape-books.com

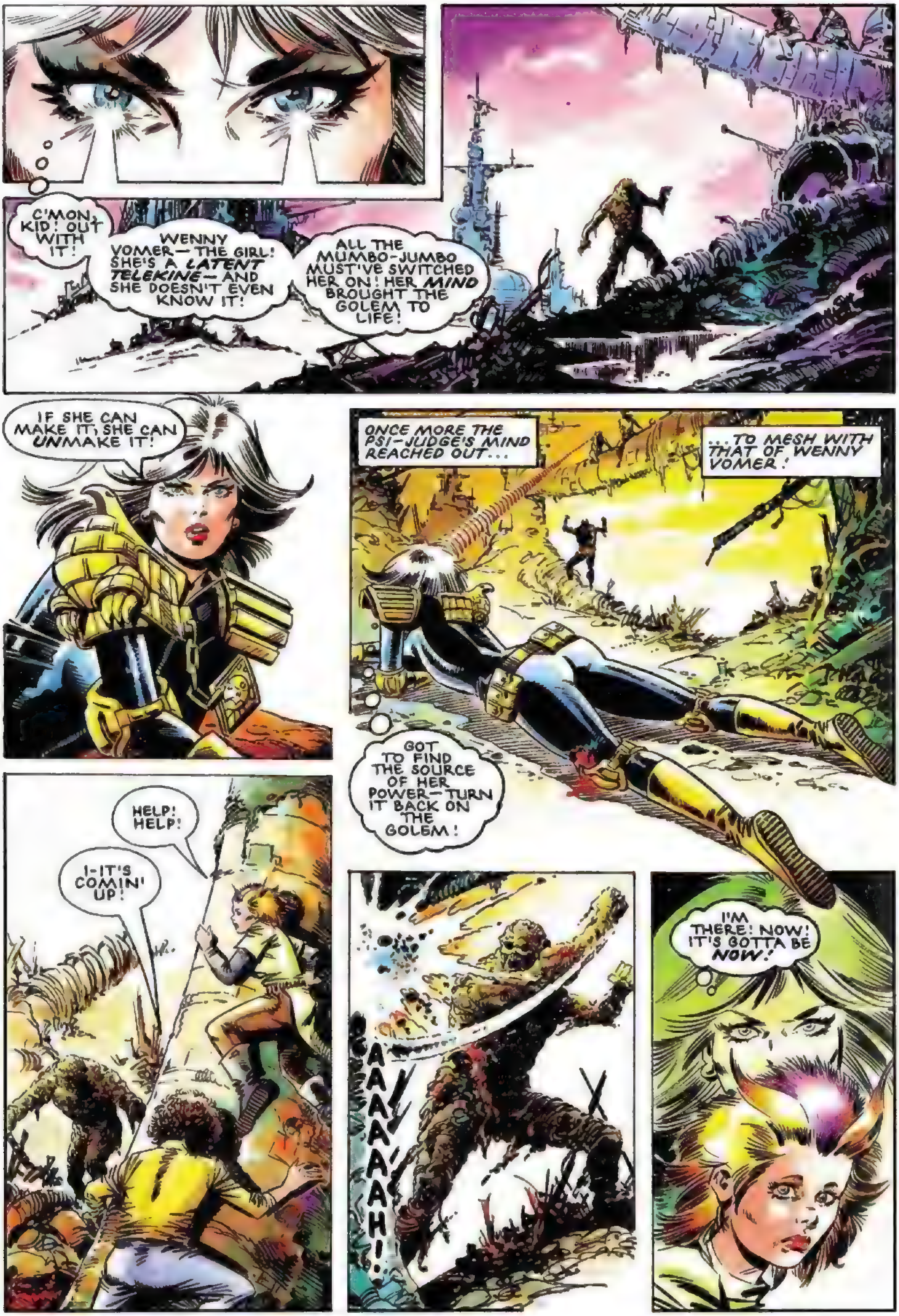

ANDERSON PSI DIVISION
GOLEM
THEY WERE JUST MEGA-CITY KIDS. THEY DIDN'T MEAN ANY HARM.
THEY DID IT ACCORDING TO THE BOOK, THE OLD ONE THEY'D FOUND IN THE RUINED LIBRARY OF A RECLAM ZONE...
NO ENTRY
SCRIPT ALAN GRANT
ART ROMERO
LETTERING S. POTTER
'...FIRST, TAKE YE ENTRAILS OF YE DEAD CHICKEN...'
WHAT'S A CHICKEN?
SPELLE TO CONJURE YE GOLEM
SEARCH ME, WENNY... GUESS YE DEAD RAT'LL HAVETA DO!
'ADD YE HANDFUL OF DUST, SCOOPED FROM SHADOWED EARTH...
...THIRTEEN SPYDERS, CRUSHED...
...YE MEASURE OF GREEN SLIME...'
"'...NOW MOULD YE THAT PASTE INTO SHAPE OF YE DOLL AND SET IT IN YE LIGHT OF YE FULL MOON...'"

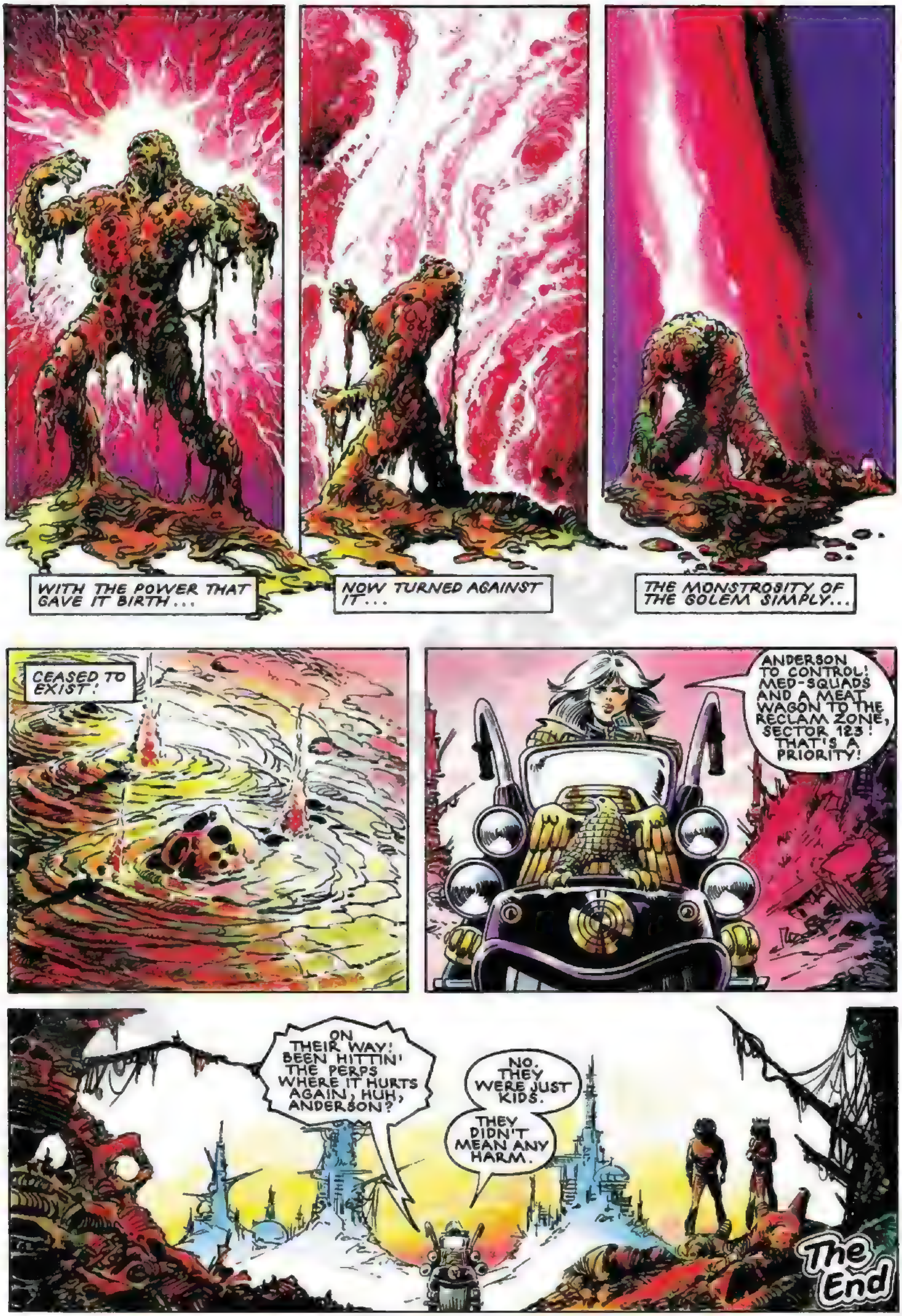

'THEN CHANT YE: ADAMNAN! ABRAXAS! AMALAK!'
ADAMNAN! ABRAXAS! AMALAK!
ADAMNAN! ABRAXAS! AMALAK!
AND THEN—
IT HAPPENED!
NEARBY, PSI-JUDGE ANDERSON WAS ON PATROL—
MY HEAD—!
I'M PICKIN' UP SOME KIND OF PSYCHIC FLASH! THE RECLAM ZONE—


RIDE!
MOLEY! IT'S GROWING! WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
W-WE GOT TO COMMAND IT. LEMME SEE...
G-GOT IT! WE SAY: 'PAX VOBIS, GOLEM. PAX.' O-OKAY? ALL TOGETHER NOW—
P-P-PAX V-VOBIS...
AAAAAGH!
HOLD IT, CREEP!
BIT BIG FOR BEATIN' UP ON KIDS, AREN'T YOU?

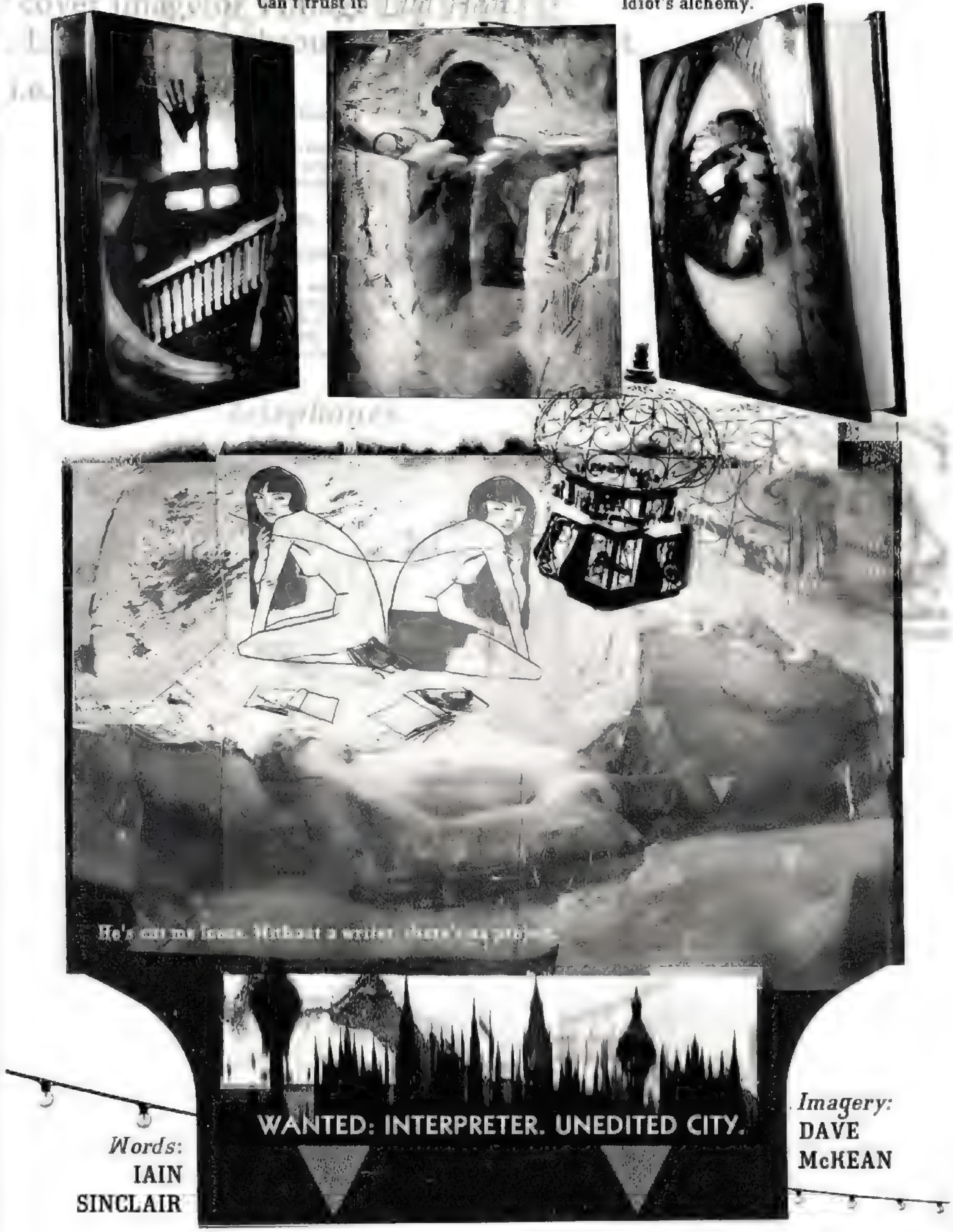

TRY PICKIN' ON SOMEBODY THAT CAN FIGHT BACK!
THWUDDD!
GRUD! WHATEVER 'MUSCLES' IS MADE OF, IT AIN'T COTTON CANDY!
KIDS! GET OUT OF HERE! RUN!
BAAADAAAM!
AAAGH!


KRAAAKK!
YOU HEARD THE JUDGE— RUN!
IT'S GOING AFTER THEM!
G-GOT TO STOP IT...
NO GOOD! LEG WON'T HOLD ME!
KID'S FINISHED— BUT HE CAN STILL TELL ME WHAT I NEED TO KNOW!
AS THE PSI-JUDGE ESTABLISHED CONTACT, LATENT IMAGES FROM THE DEAD BOY'S MIND FLOODED OVER HER—
A GOLEM! CONJURED IT UP WITH A SPELL BOOK!
BUT THERE'S GOTTA BE MORE! COUPLE OF CRUSHED SPIDERS DON'T ADD UP TO THAT... MONSTROSITY!


C'MON, KID! OUT WITH IT!
WENNY VOMER—THE GIRL! SHE'S A LATENT TELEKINE—AND SHE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW IT!
ALL THE MUMBO-JUMBO MUST'VE SWITCHED HER ON! HER MIND BROUGHT THE GOLEM TO LIFE!
IF SHE CAN MAKE IT, SHE CAN UNMAKE IT!
ONCE MORE THE PSI-JUDGE'S MIND REACHED OUT...
...TO MESH WITH THAT OF WENNY VOMER.
GOT TO FIND THE SOURCE OF HER POWER—TURN IT BACK ON THE GOLEM!
HELP! HELP!
I-IT'S COMIN' UP!
AAAAAAAAH!
I'M THERE! NOW! IT'S GOTTA BE NOW!

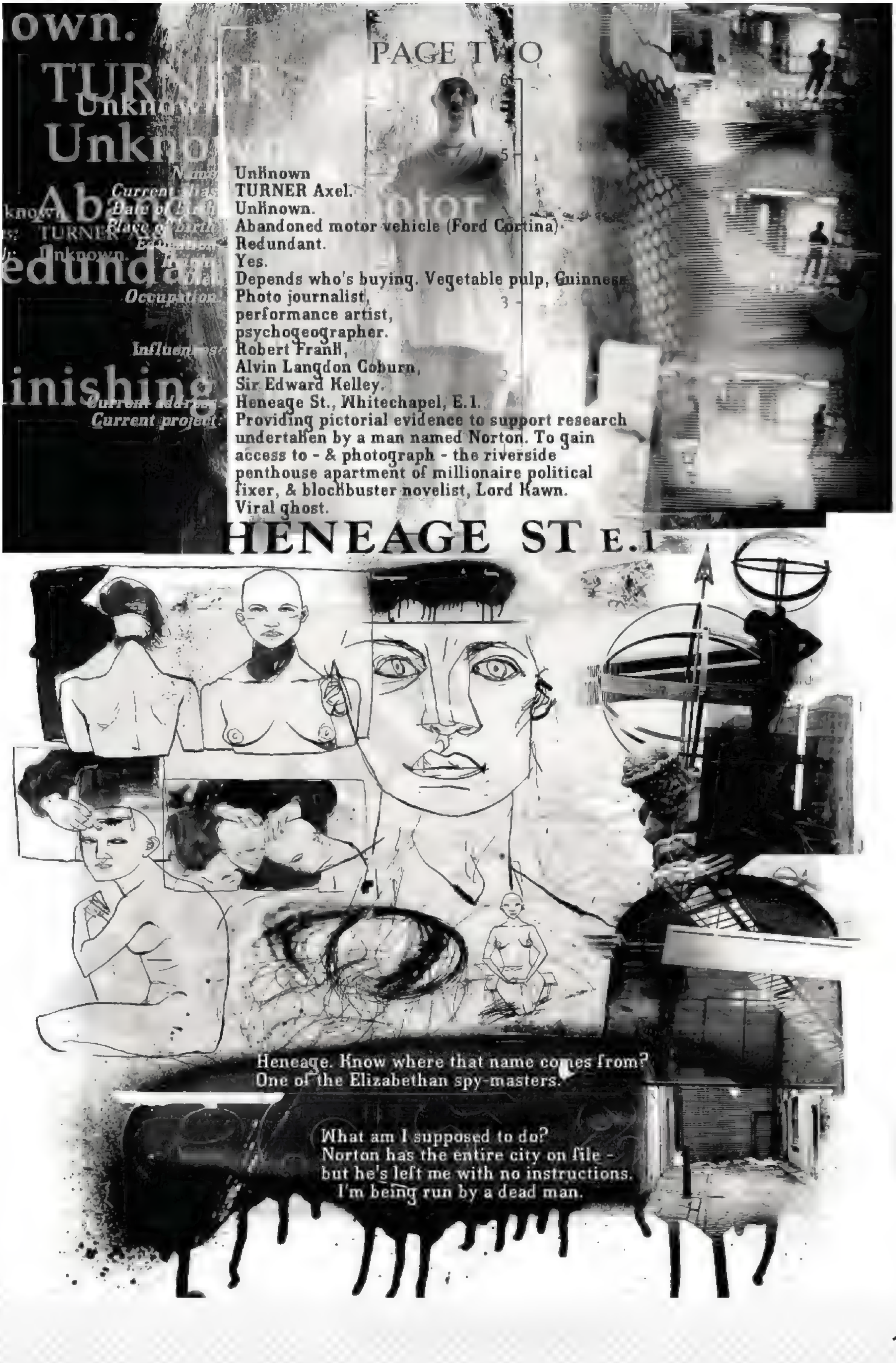

WITH THE POWER THAT GAVE IT BIRTH...
NOW TURNED AGAINST IT...
THE MONSTROSITY OF THE GOLEM SIMPLY...
CEASED TO EXIST!
ANDERSON TO CONTROL! MED-SQUADS AND A MEAT WAGON TO THE RECLAM ZONE, SECTOR 123! THAT'S A PRIORITY!
ON THEIR WAY! BEEN HITTIN' THE PERPS WHERE IT HURTS AGAIN, HUH, ANDERSON?
NO. THEY WERE JUST KIDS.
THEY DIDN'T MEAN ANY HARM.
The End

The Griffin's Egg


High windows. Keep light out. Can't trust it.
Headache's killing me.
Egg, eye, granite acorn. Idiot's alchemy.
He's cut me loose. Without a writer, there's no project.
WANTED: INTERPRETER. UNEDITED CITY.

Words:
IAIN SINCLAIR

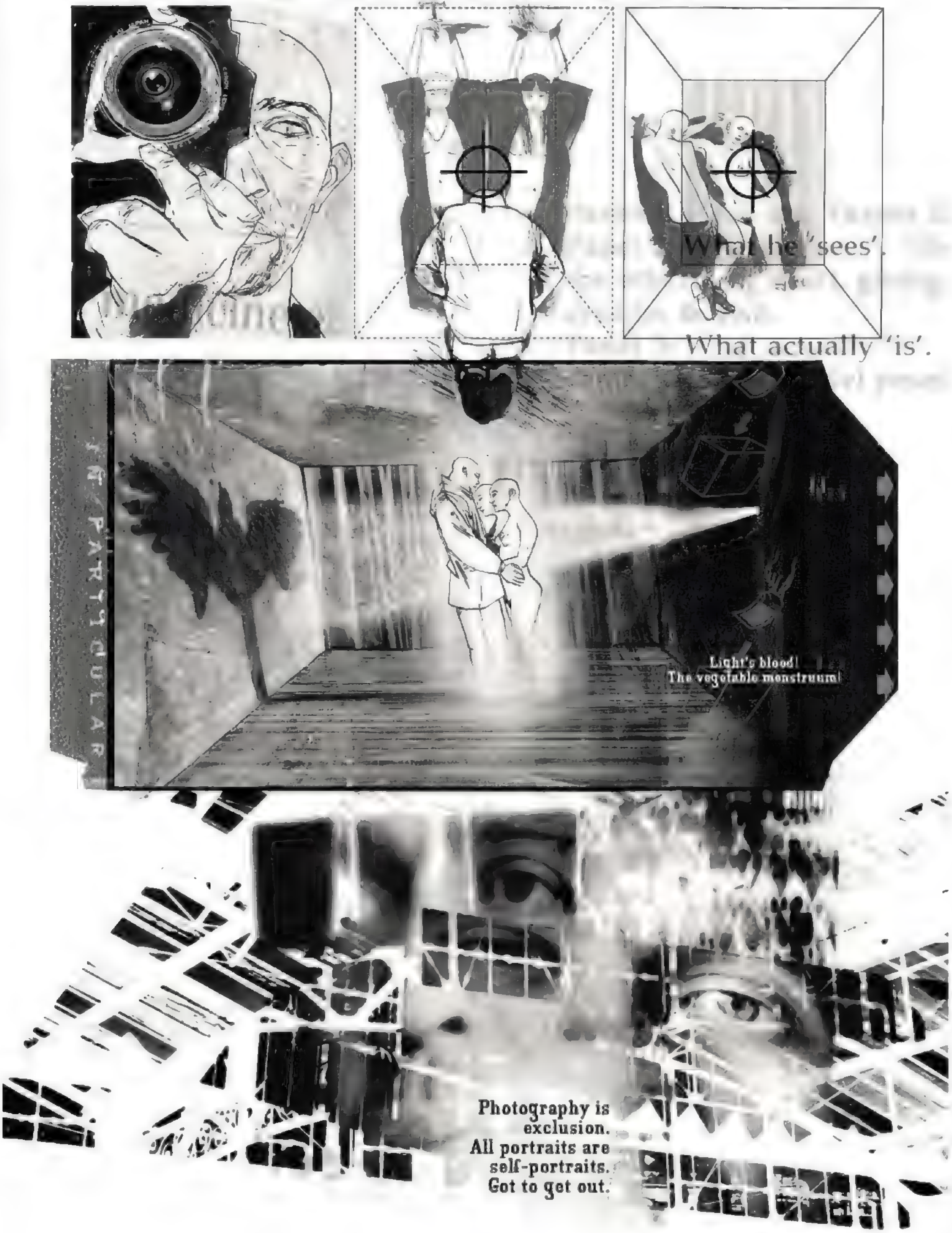
Imagery:
DAVE McKEAN

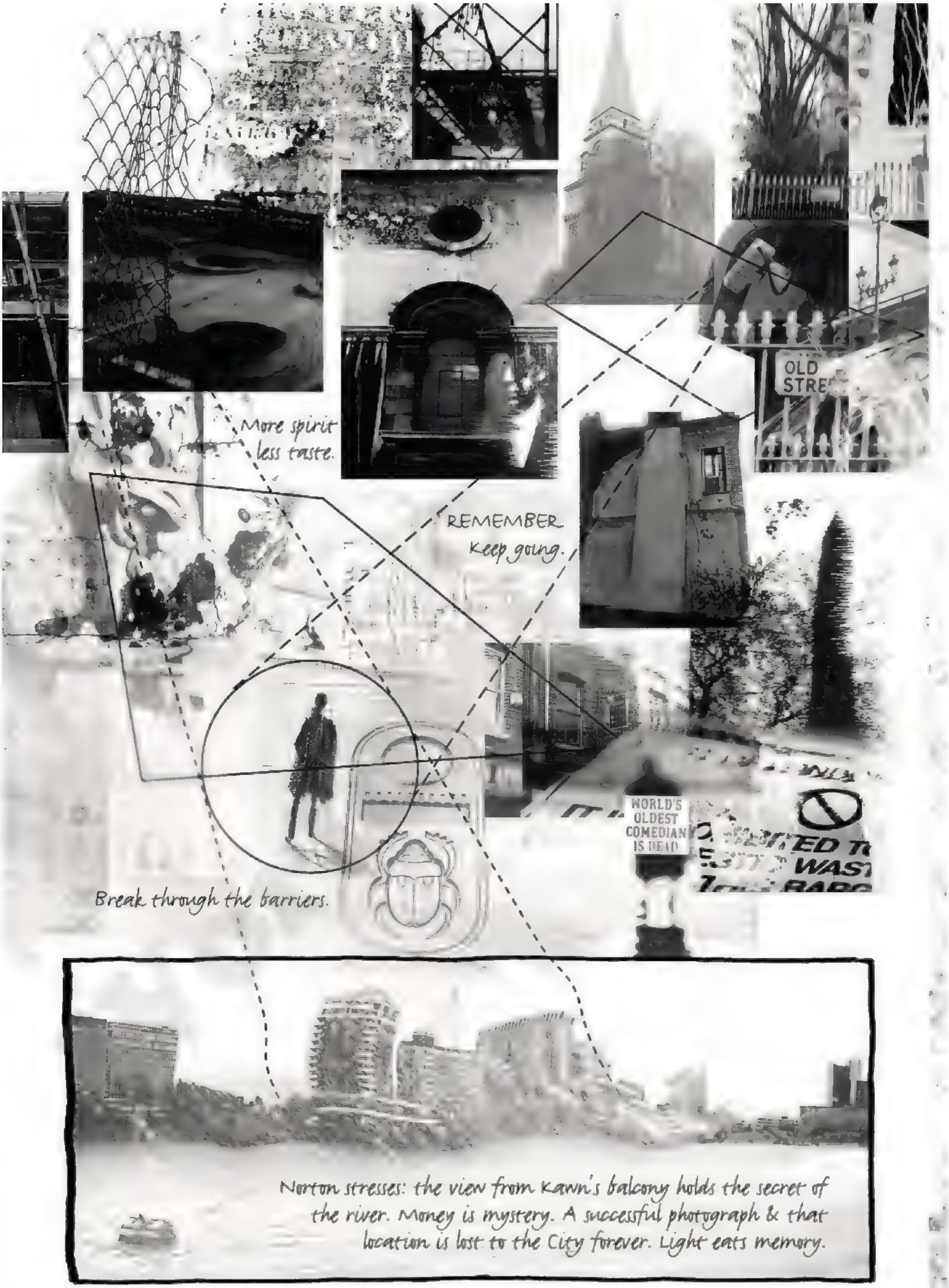


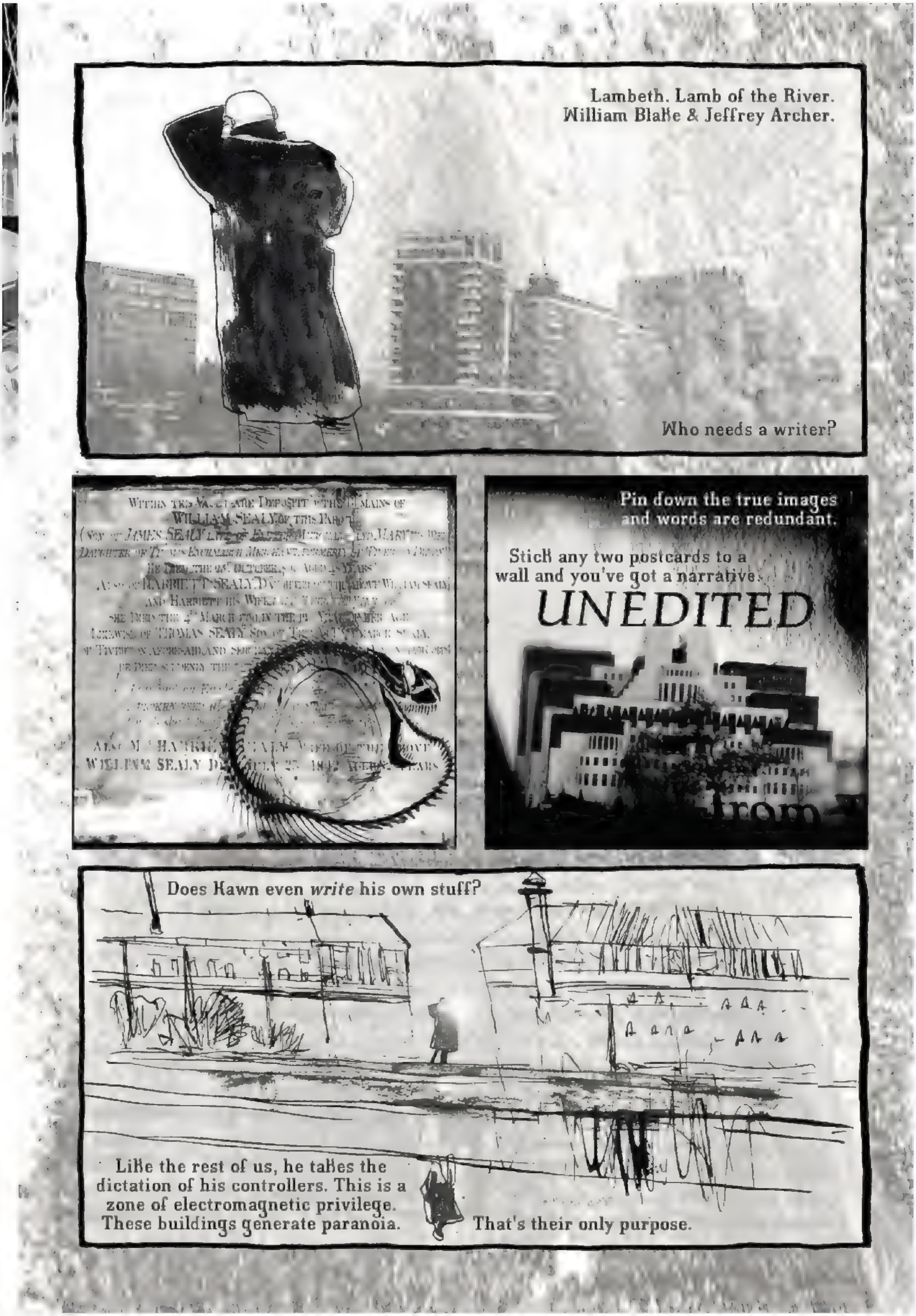
Unknown
TURNER Axel.
Unknown.
Abandoned motor vehicle (Ford Cortina)
Redundant.
Yes.
Depends who's buying. Vegetable pulp, Guinness.
Occupation: Photo journalist,
performance artist,
psychogeographer.
Robert Frank,
Alvin Langdon Coburn,
Sir Edward Kelley.
Heneage St., Whitechapel, E.1.
Current project: Providing pictorial evidence to support research undertaken by a man named Norton. To gain access to - & photograph - the riverside penthouse apartment of millionaire political fixer, & blockbuster novelist, Lord Kawn.
Viral ghost.

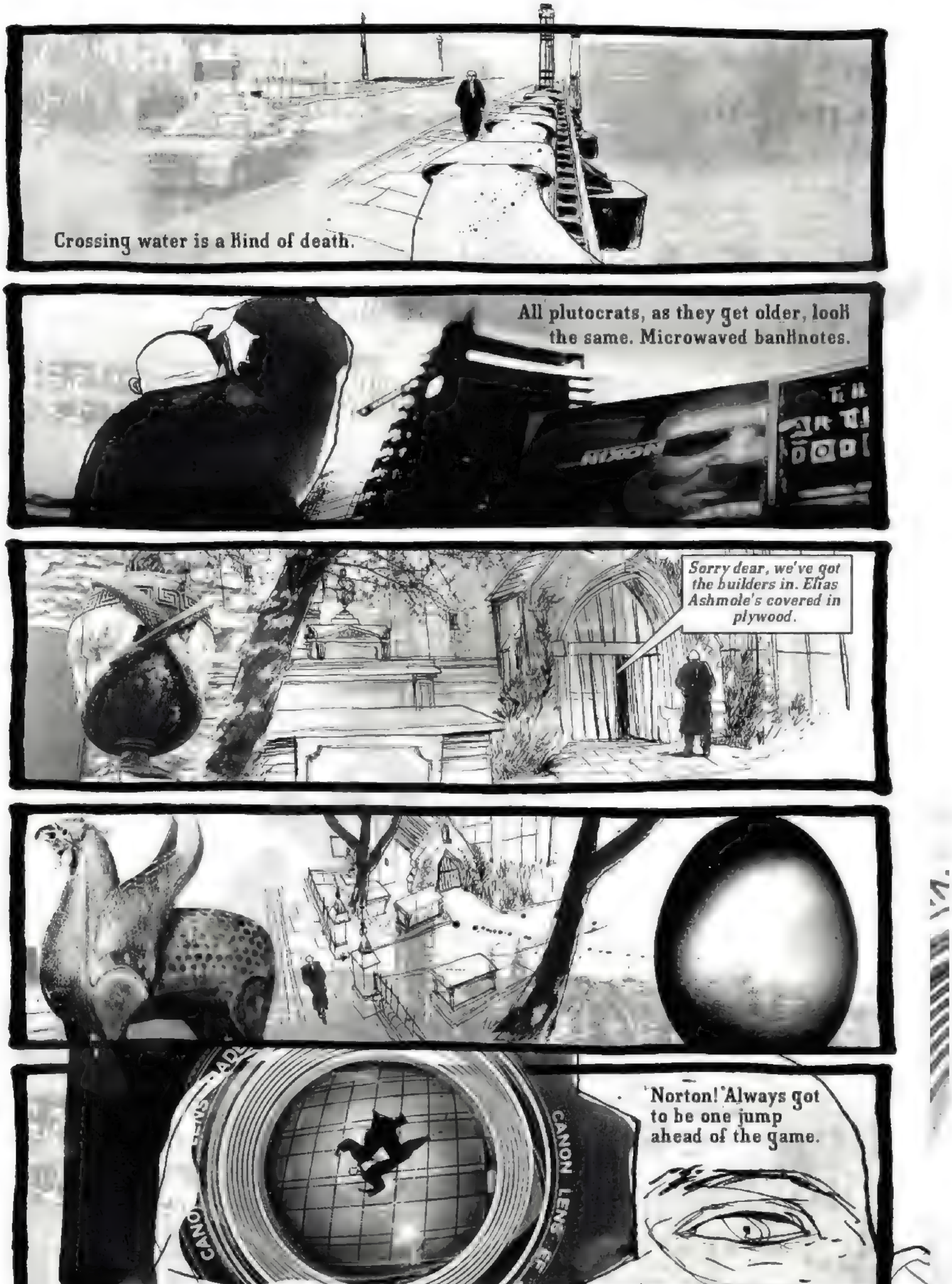
own.
TURNER
Unknown
Unknown
Aband
edundan
inishing
PAGE TWO
HENEAGE ST E.1
Heneage. Know where that name comes from? One of the Elizabethan spy-masters.
What am I supposed to do? Norton has the entire city on file - but he's left me with no instructions. I'm being run by a dead man.

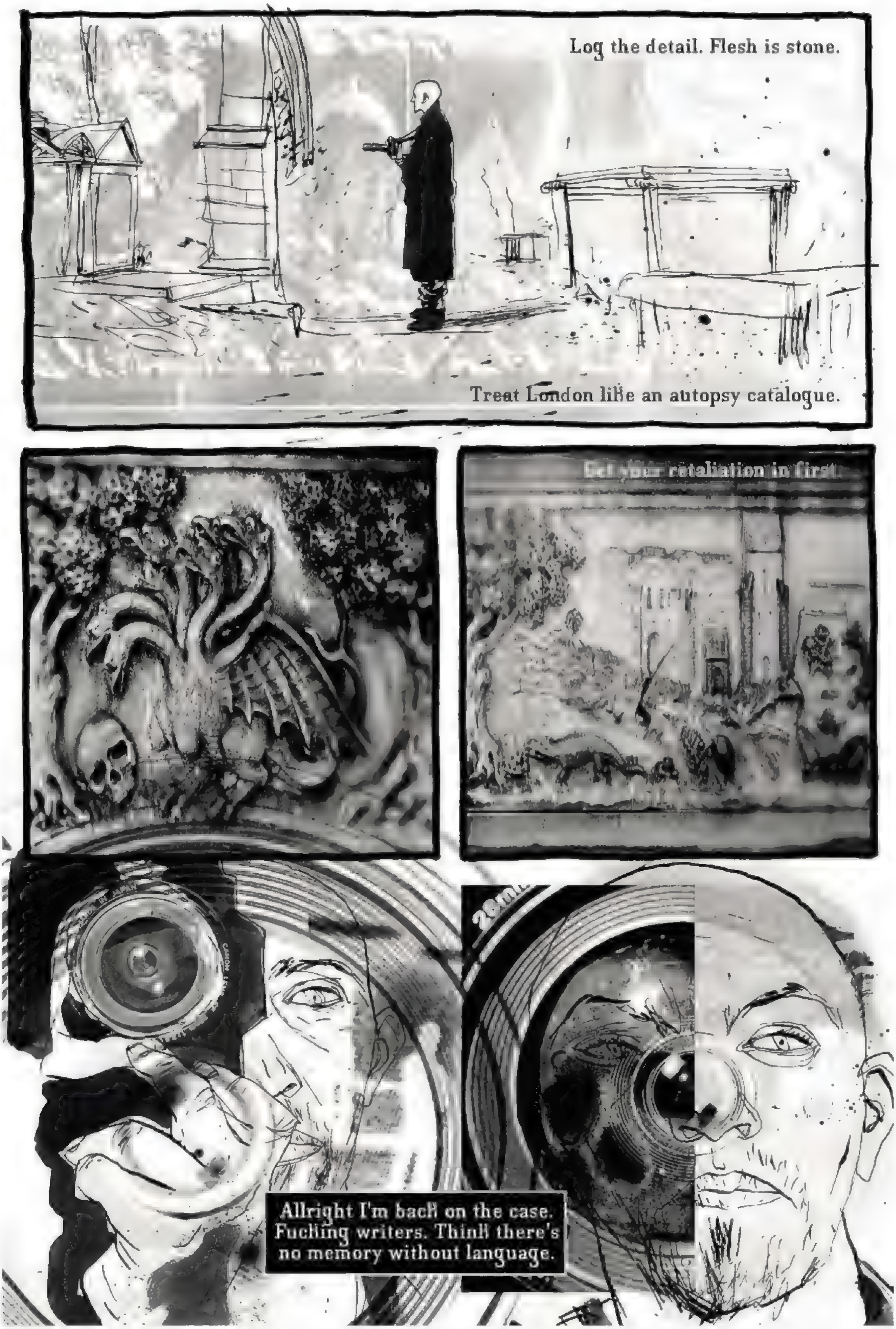
TURNER'S CAMERA HAS A MIND OF ITS OWN. INSTEAD OF REPORTING, IT INVENTS. AN UNRELIABLE INSTRUMENT OF FICTION, CURSED WITH MEMORY.

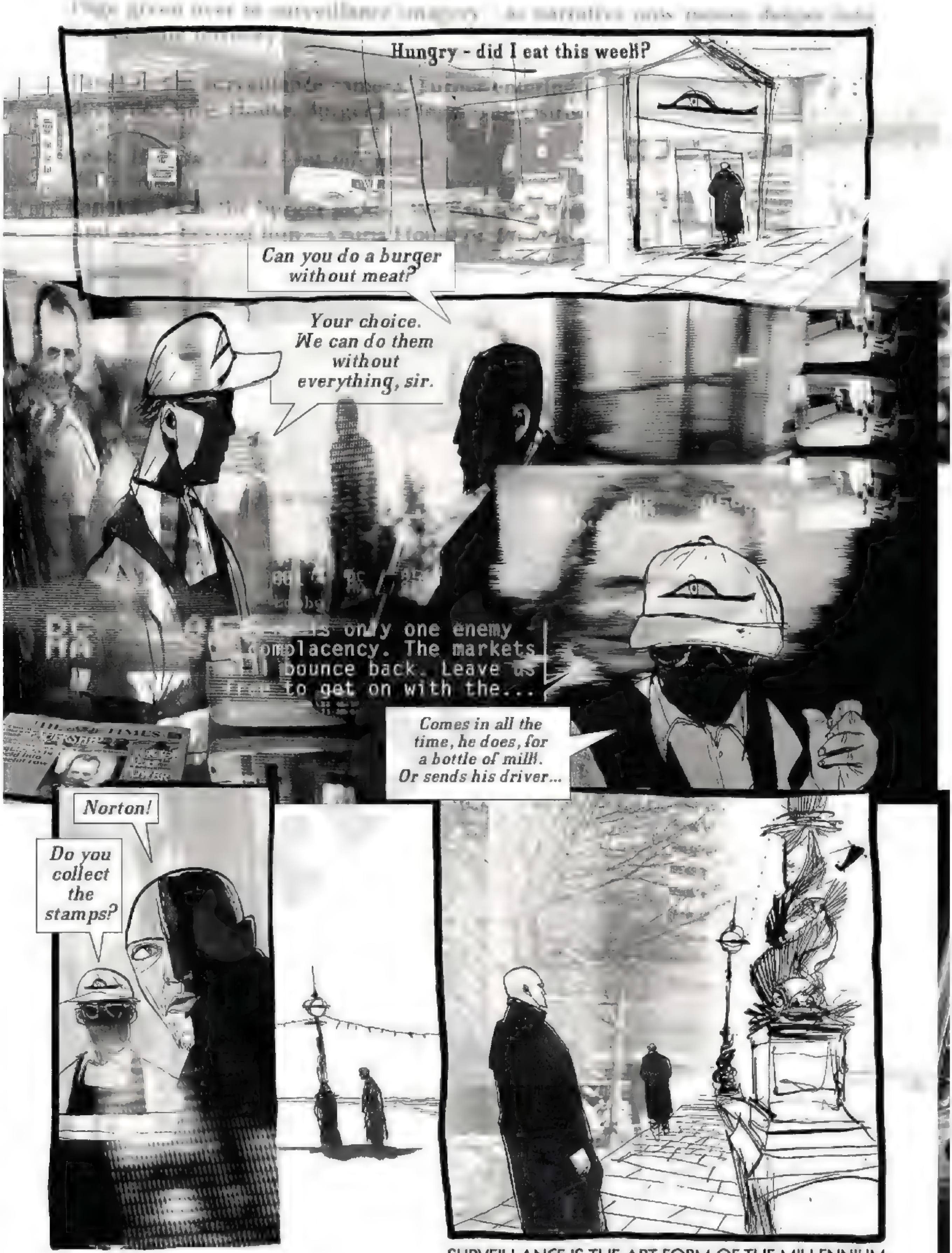

What he 'sees'.
What actually 'is'.
PARTICULAR
Light's blood!
The vegetable menstruum!
Photography is exclusion.
All portraits are self-portraits.
Got to get out.


More spirit
less taste.
OLD
STRE
REMEMBER
Keep going.
WORLD'S
OLDEST
COMEDIAN
IS DEAD
ED T
WAST
Break through the barriers.
Norton stresses: the view from Kawn's balcony holds the secret of the river. Money is mystery. A successful photograph & that location is lost to the City forever. Light eats memory.

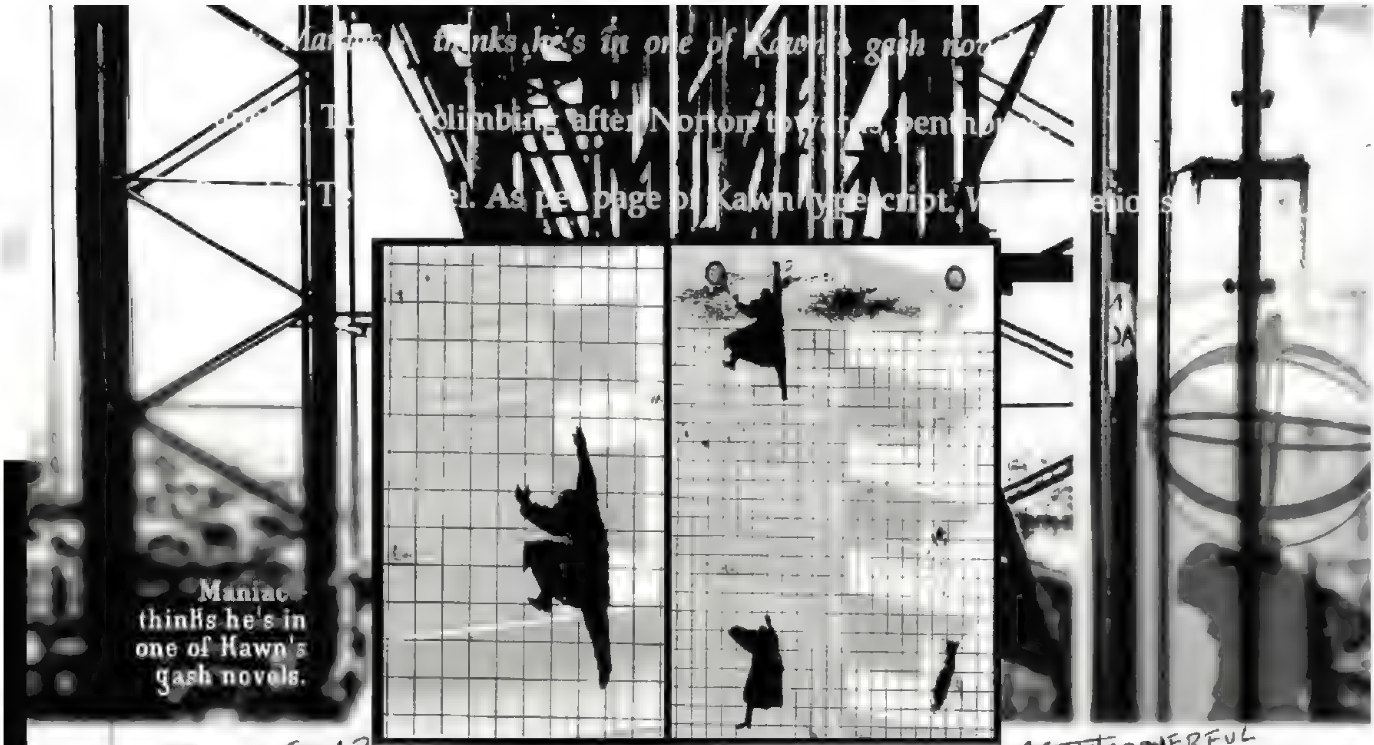

Lambeth. Lamb of the River.
William Blake & Jeffrey Archer.
Who needs a writer?
WILLIAM SEALY of this Parish
WILLIAM SEALY
Pin down the true images and words are redundant.
Stick any two postcards to a wall and you've got a narrative.
UNEDITED
Does Hawn even *write* his own stuff?
Like the rest of us, he takes the dictation of his controllers. This is a zone of electromagnetic privilege. These buildings generate paranoia.
That's their only purpose.


Crossing water is a kind of death.
All plutocrats, as they get older, look the same. Microwaved banknotes.
Sorry dear, we've got the builders in. Elias Ashmole's covered in plywood.
Norton! Always got to be one jump ahead of the game.
CANON LENS EF

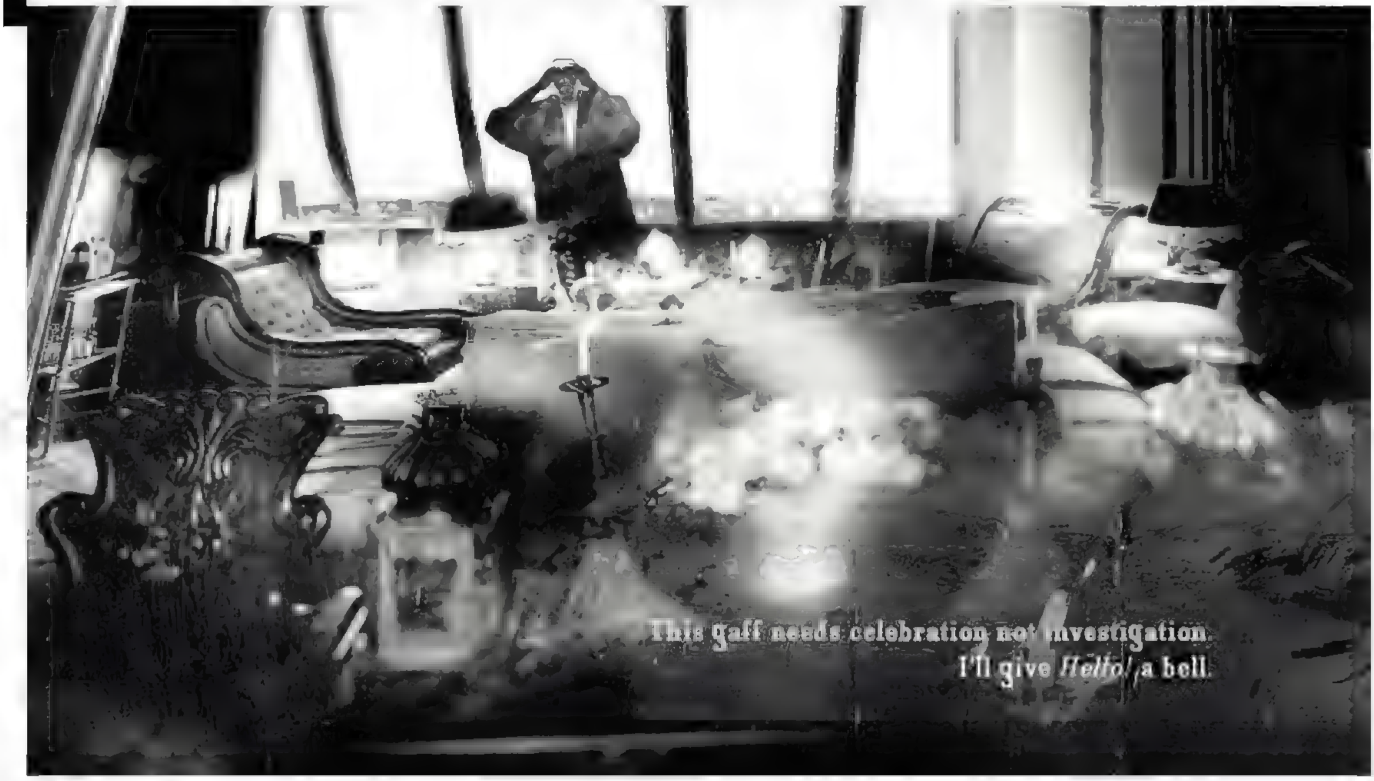

Log the detail. Flesh is stone.
Treat London like an autopsy catalogue.
Get your retaliation in first.
Allright I'm back on the case. Fucking writers. Think there's no memory without language.

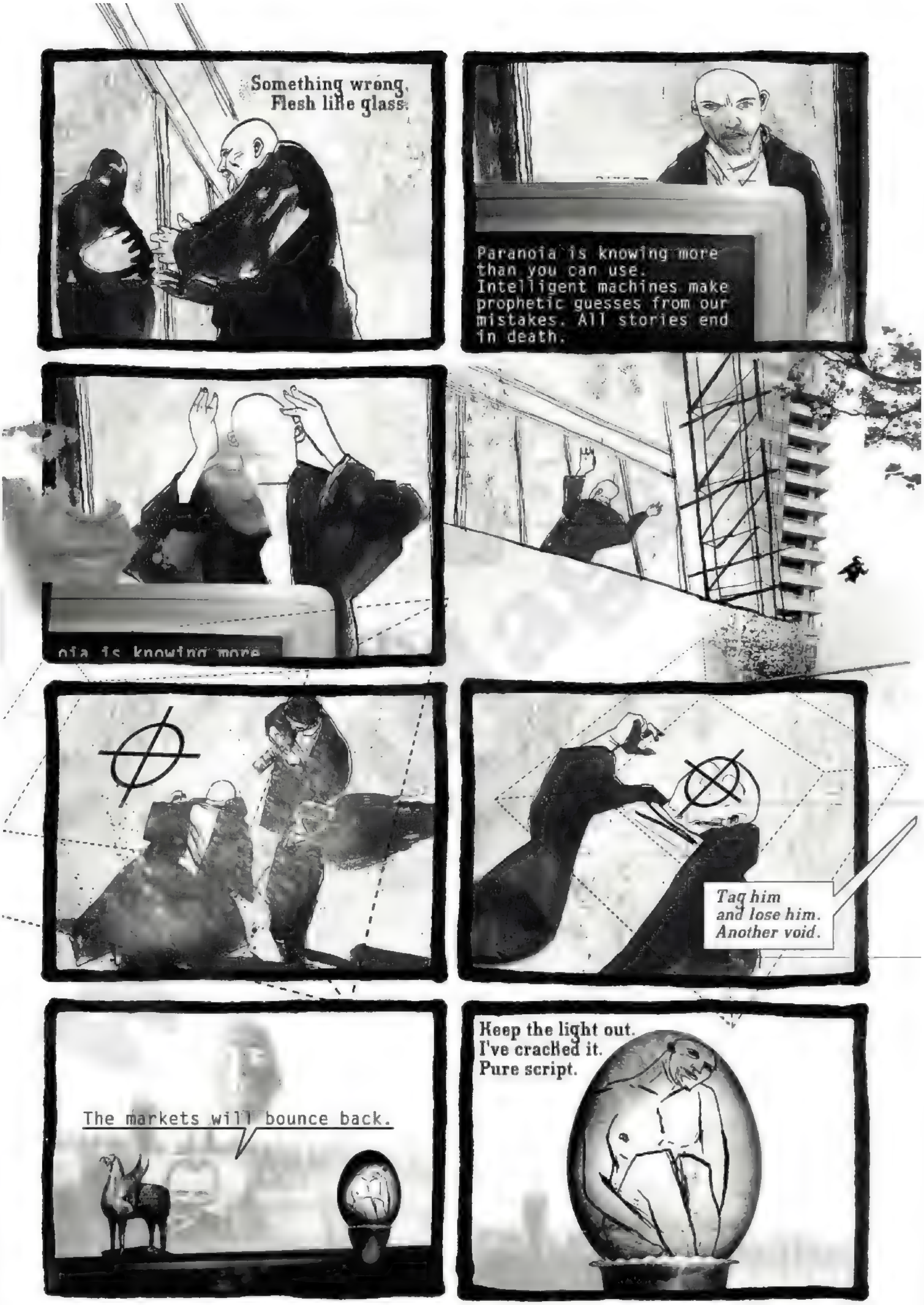

Hungry - did I eat this week?
Can you do a burger without meat?
Your choice. We can do them without everything, sir.
...is only one enemy - complacency. The markets will bounce back. Leave us free to get on with the...
Comes in all the time, he does, for a bottle of milk. Or sends his driver...
Norton!
Do you collect the stamps?

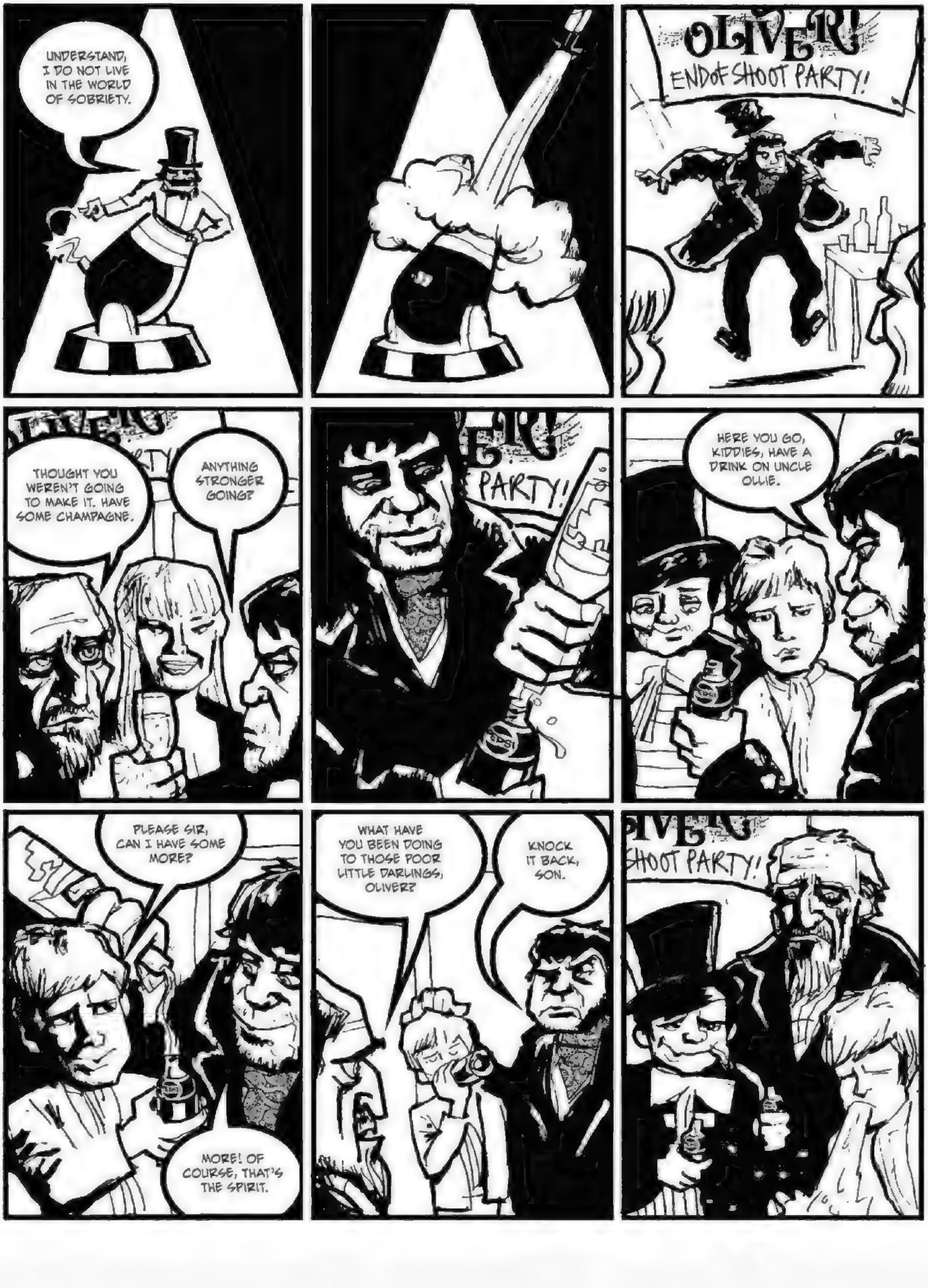
SURVEILLANCE IS THE ART FORM OF THE MILLENNIUM

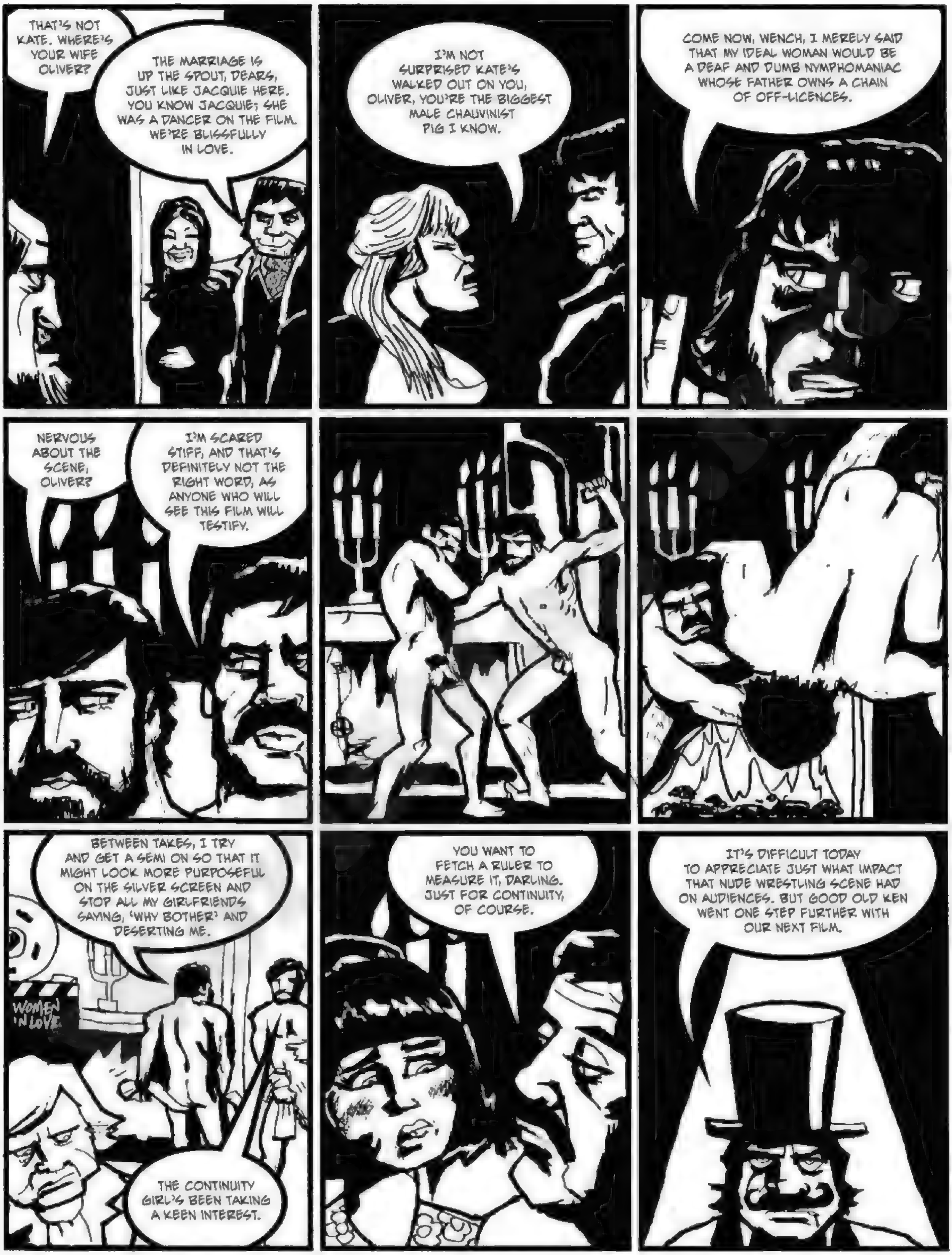

Maniac … thinks he's in one of Kawn's gash nov
T… climbing after Norton towards penth
T… el. As per page of Kawn typescript, W… …ious
Maniac thinks he's in one of Kawn's gash novels.

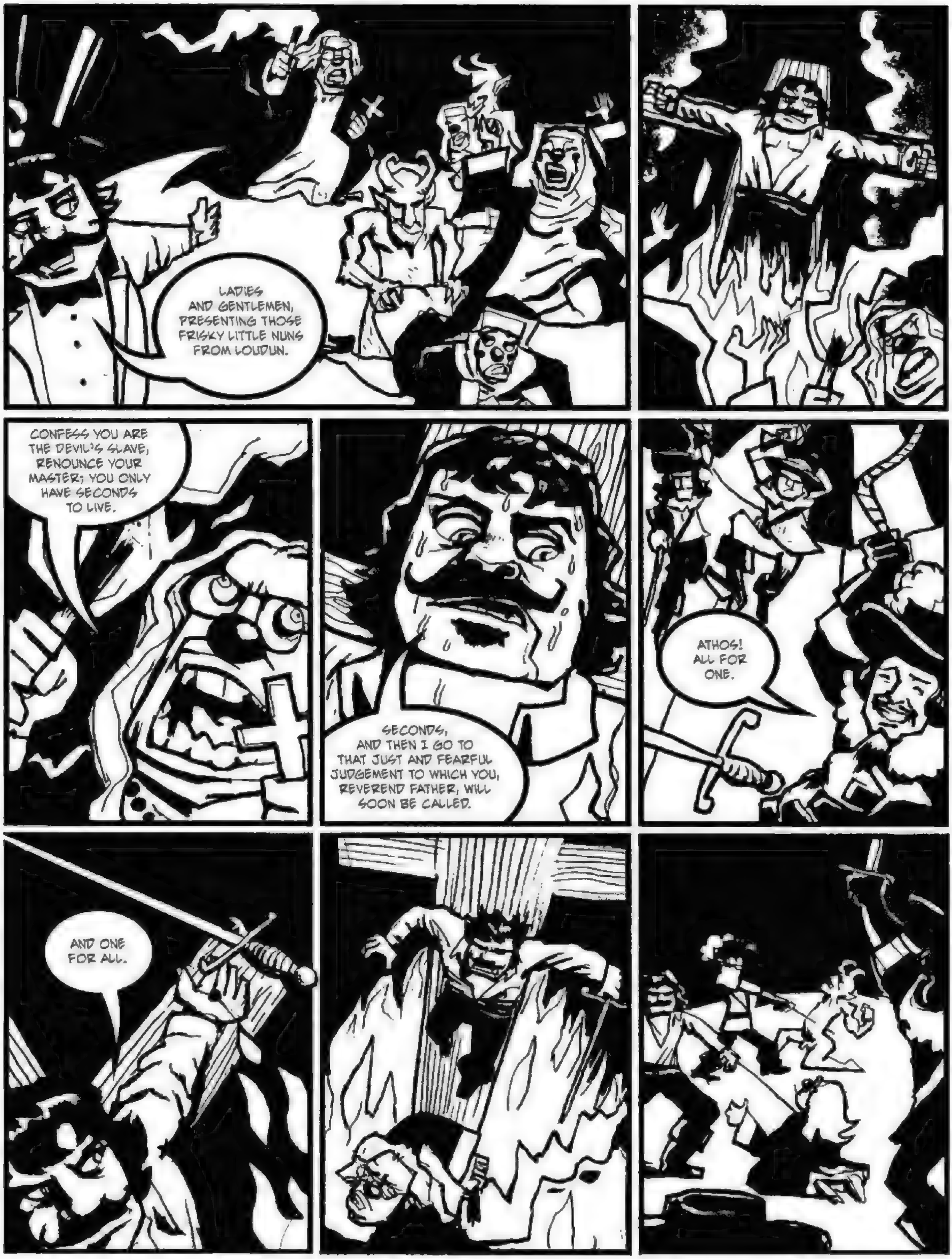
~~Feer~~ FEAR was unknown to him. Like some ~~agyl~~ ~~AGILE~~ POWERFUL jungle creature, he swung, from strut to strut, in pursuit of his faceless ~~queery~~ QUARRY. Would he be in time to prevent his enemy from learning the awful secret of the penthouse? The fact that it was unoccupied. That no living ~~creeture~~ CREATURE had ever

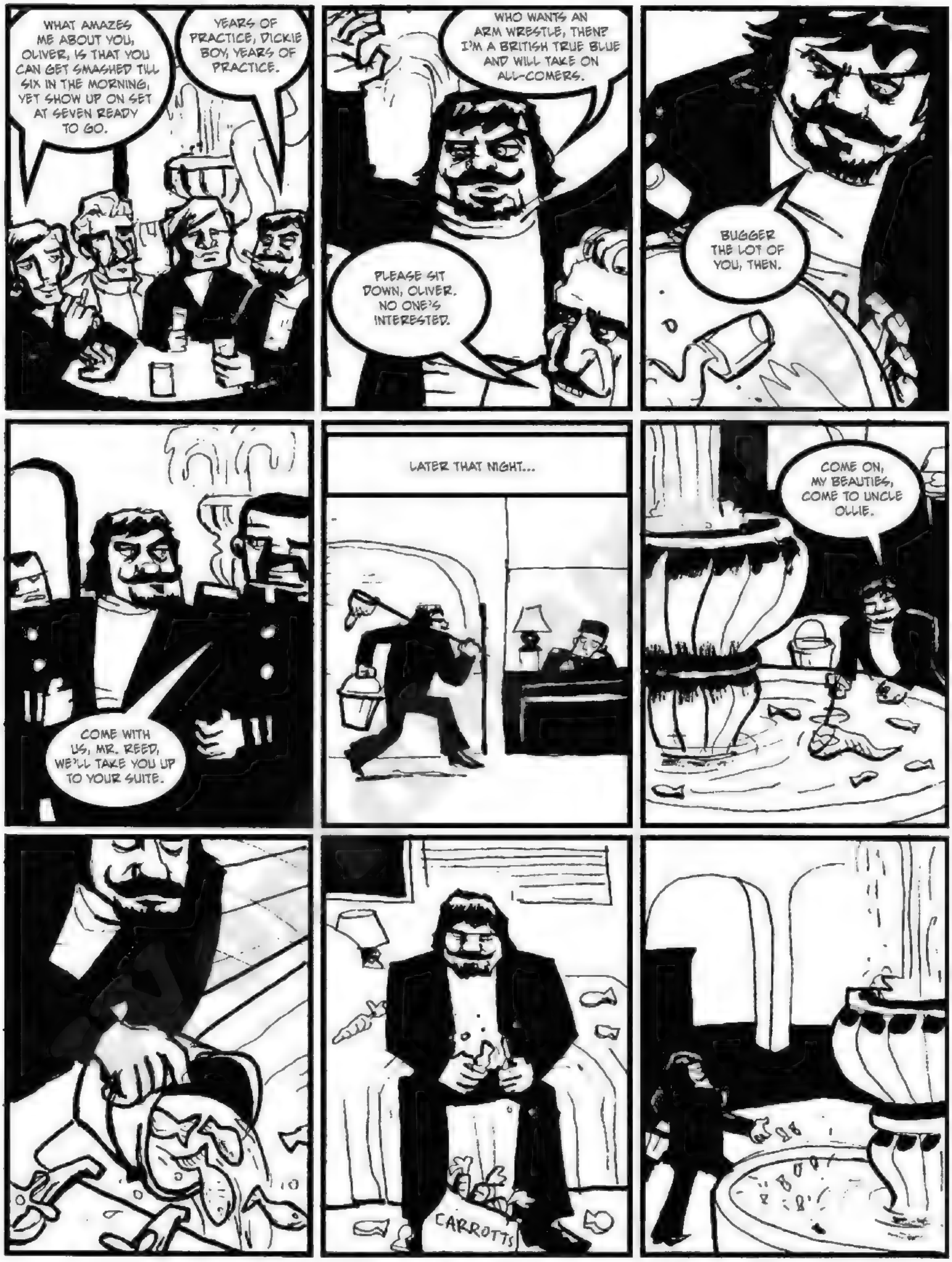

This gaff needs celebration not investigation.
I'll give *Hello!* a bell.

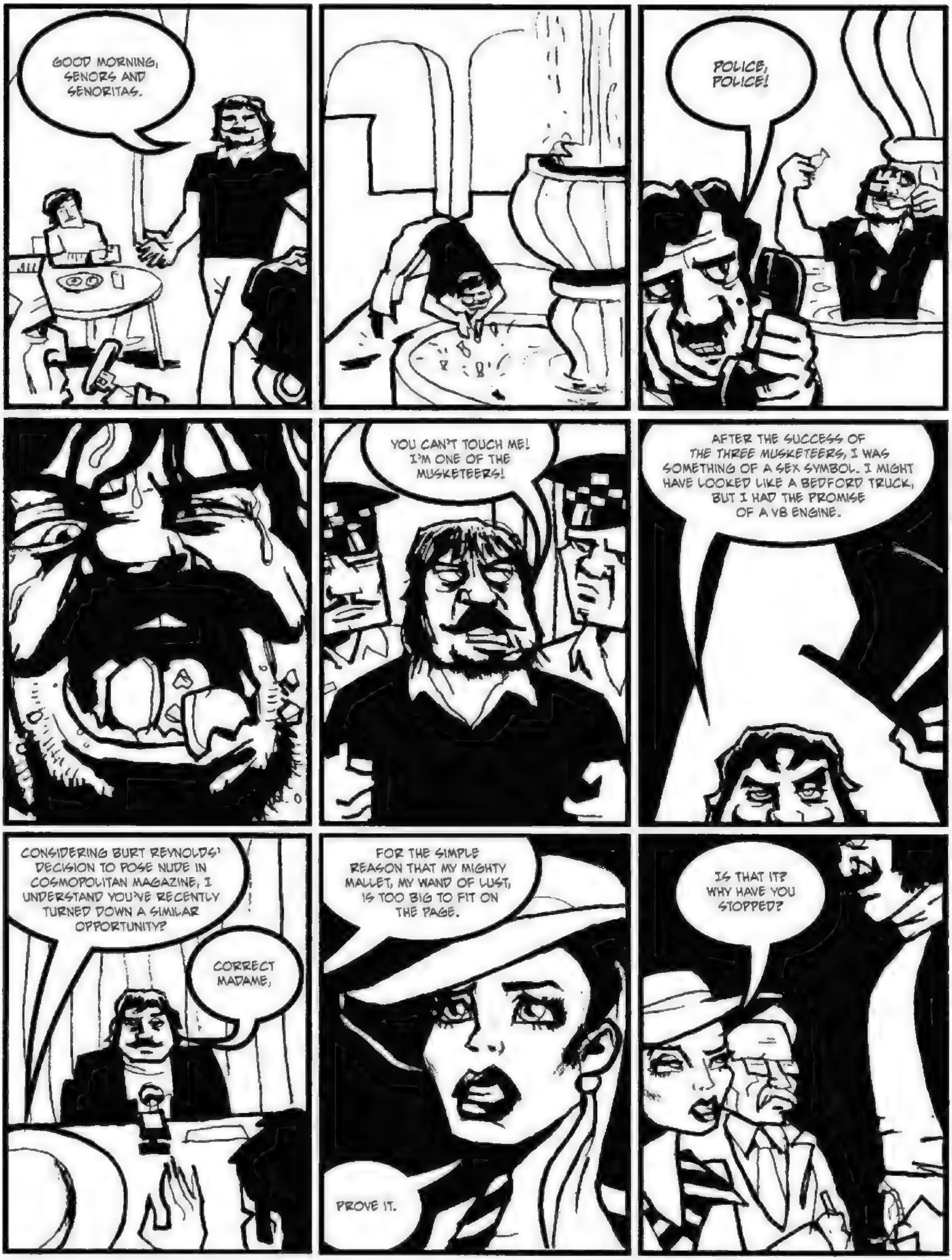

Something wrong.
Flesh like glass.
Paranoia is knowing more than you can use. Intelligent machines make prophetic guesses from our mistakes. All stories end in death.
oia is knowing more
Tag him and lose him. Another void.
The markets will bounce back.
Keep the light out. I've cracked it. Pure script.

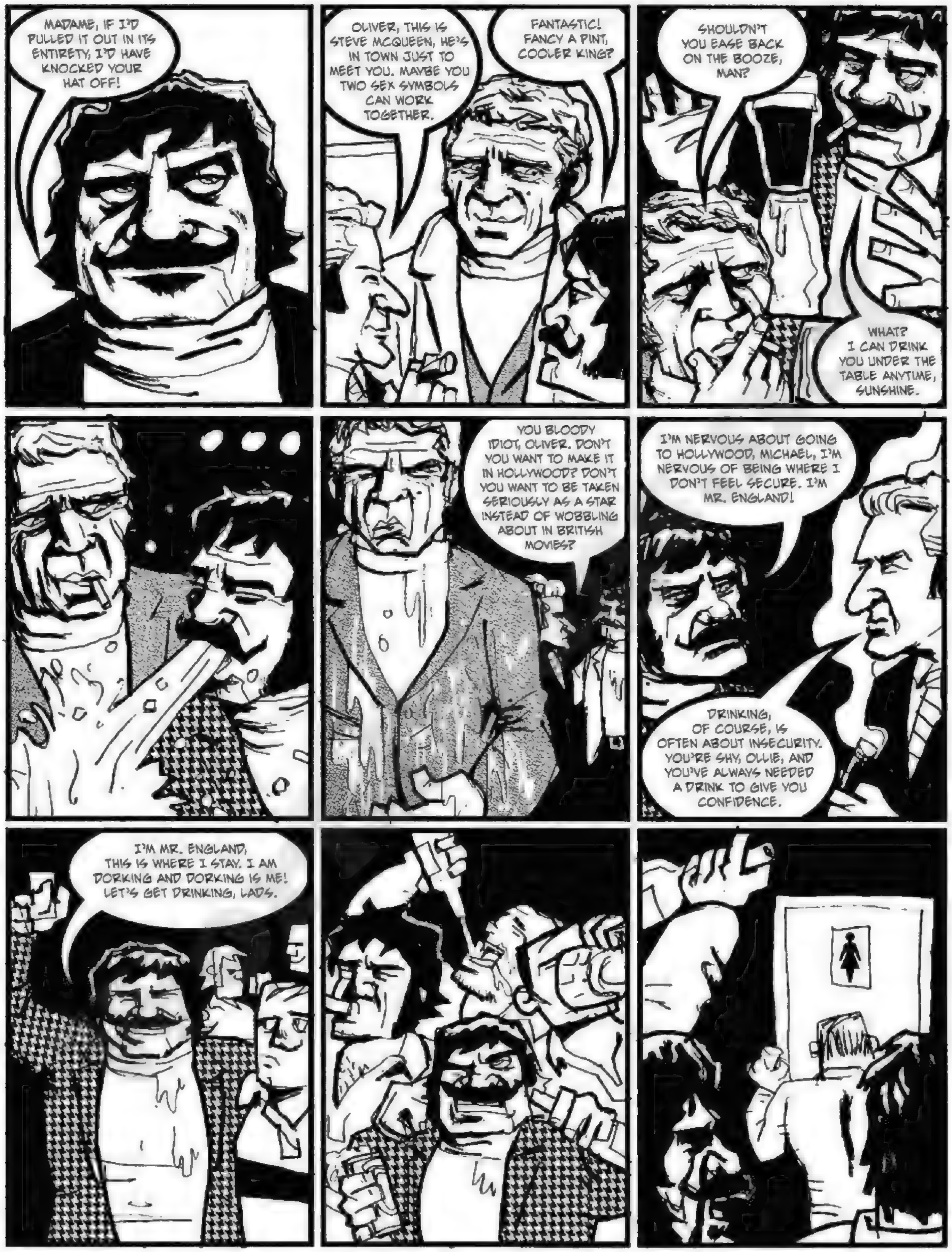

UNDERSTAND, I DO NOT LIVE IN THE WORLD OF SOBRIETY.
OLIVER!
END of SHOOT PARTY!
THOUGHT YOU WEREN'T GOING TO MAKE IT. HAVE SOME CHAMPAGNE.
ANYTHING STRONGER GOING?
PARTY!
HERE YOU GO, KIDDIES, HAVE A DRINK ON UNCLE OLLIE.
PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE?
MORE! OF COURSE, THAT'S THE SPIRIT.
WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING TO THOSE POOR LITTLE DARLINGS, OLIVER?
KNOCK IT BACK, SON.
SHOOT PARTY!

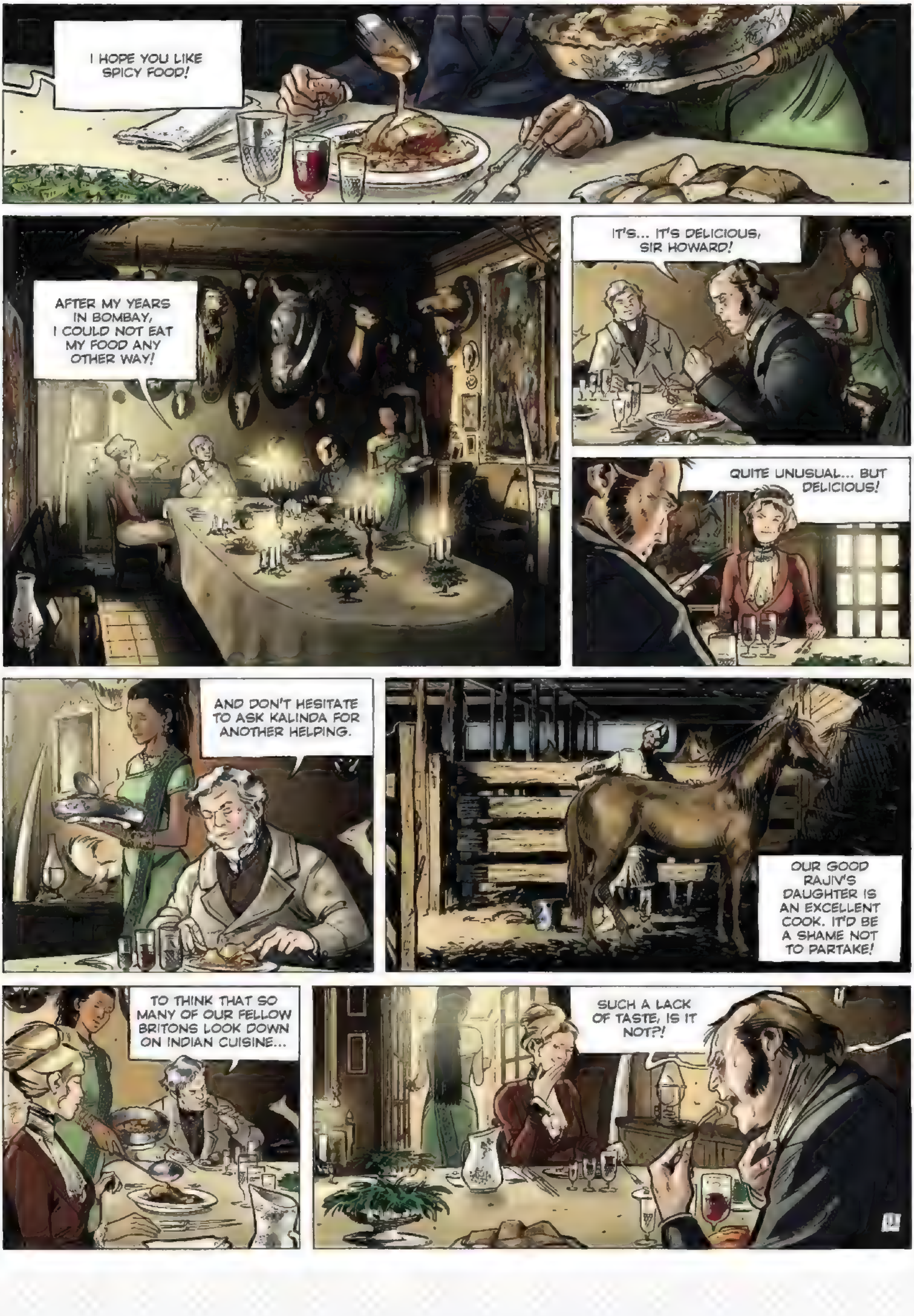

THAT'S NOT KATE. WHERE'S YOUR WIFE OLIVER?
THE MARRIAGE IS UP THE SPOUT, DEARS, JUST LIKE JACQUIE HERE. YOU KNOW JACQUIE; SHE WAS A DANCER ON THE FILM. WE'RE BLISSFULLY IN LOVE.
I'M NOT SURPRISED KATE'S WALKED OUT ON YOU, OLIVER, YOU'RE THE BIGGEST MALE CHAUVINIST PIG I KNOW.
COME NOW, WENCH, I MERELY SAID THAT MY IDEAL WOMAN WOULD BE A DEAF AND DUMB NYMPHOMANIAC WHOSE FATHER OWNS A CHAIN OF OFF-LICENCES.
NERVOUS ABOUT THE SCENE, OLIVER?
I'M SCARED STIFF, AND THAT'S DEFINITELY NOT THE RIGHT WORD, AS ANYONE WHO WILL SEE THIS FILM WILL TESTIFY.
BETWEEN TAKES, I TRY AND GET A SEMI ON SO THAT IT MIGHT LOOK MORE PURPOSEFUL ON THE SILVER SCREEN AND STOP ALL MY GIRLFRIENDS SAYING, 'WHY BOTHER' AND DESERTING ME.
WOMEN IN LOVE
THE CONTINUITY GIRL'S BEEN TAKING A KEEN INTEREST.
YOU WANT TO FETCH A RULER TO MEASURE IT, DARLING. JUST FOR CONTINUITY, OF COURSE.
IT'S DIFFICULT TODAY TO APPRECIATE JUST WHAT IMPACT THAT NUDE WRESTLING SCENE HAD ON AUDIENCES. BUT GOOD OLD KEN WENT ONE STEP FURTHER WITH OUR NEXT FILM.

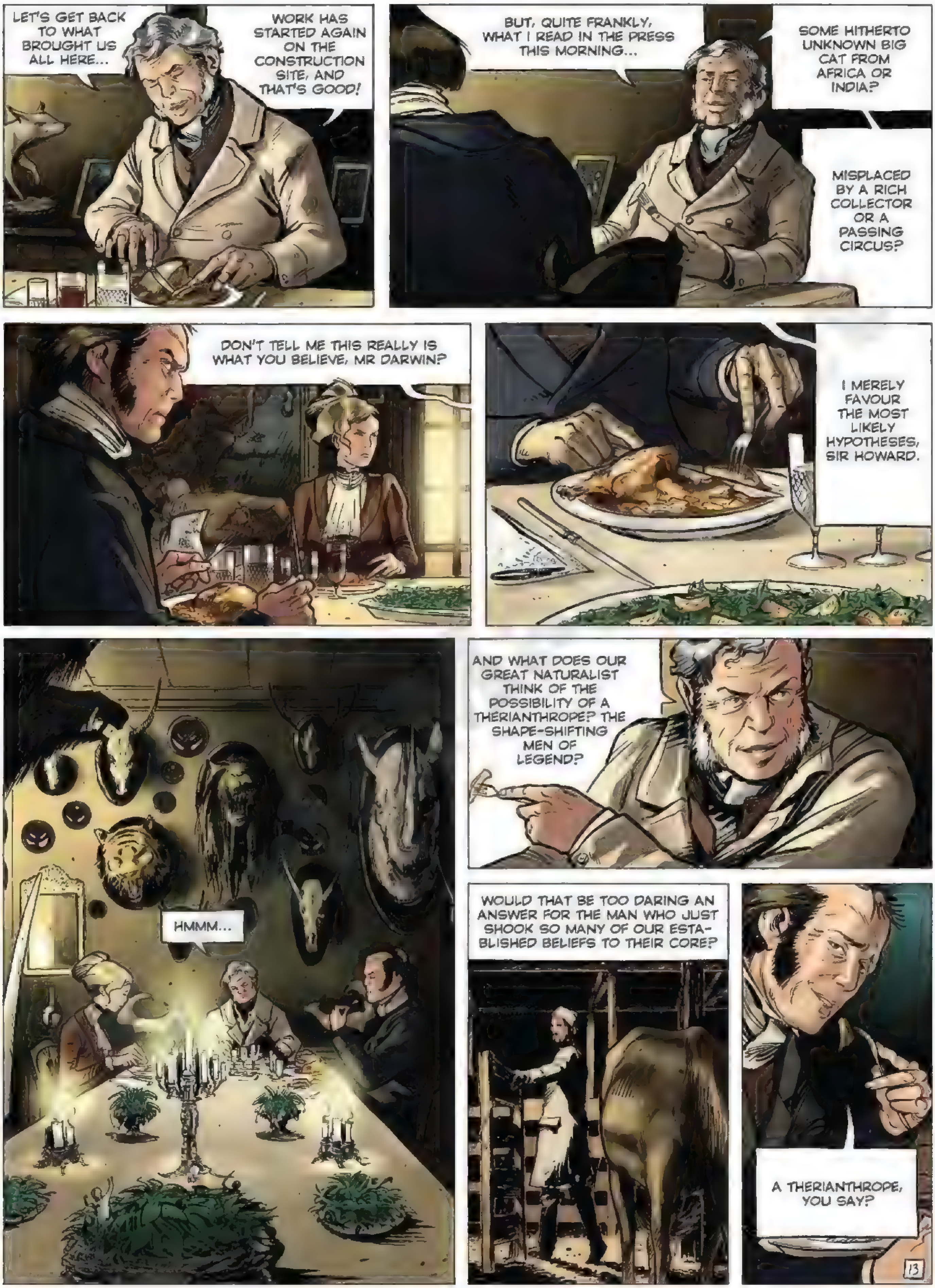

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PRESENTING THOSE FRISKY LITTLE NUNS FROM LOUDUN.
CONFESS YOU ARE THE DEVIL'S SLAVE, RENOUNCE YOUR MASTER; YOU ONLY HAVE SECONDS TO LIVE.
SECONDS, AND THEN I GO TO THAT JUST AND FEARFUL JUDGEMENT TO WHICH YOU, REVEREND FATHER, WILL SOON BE CALLED.
ATHOS! ALL FOR ONE.
AND ONE FOR ALL.

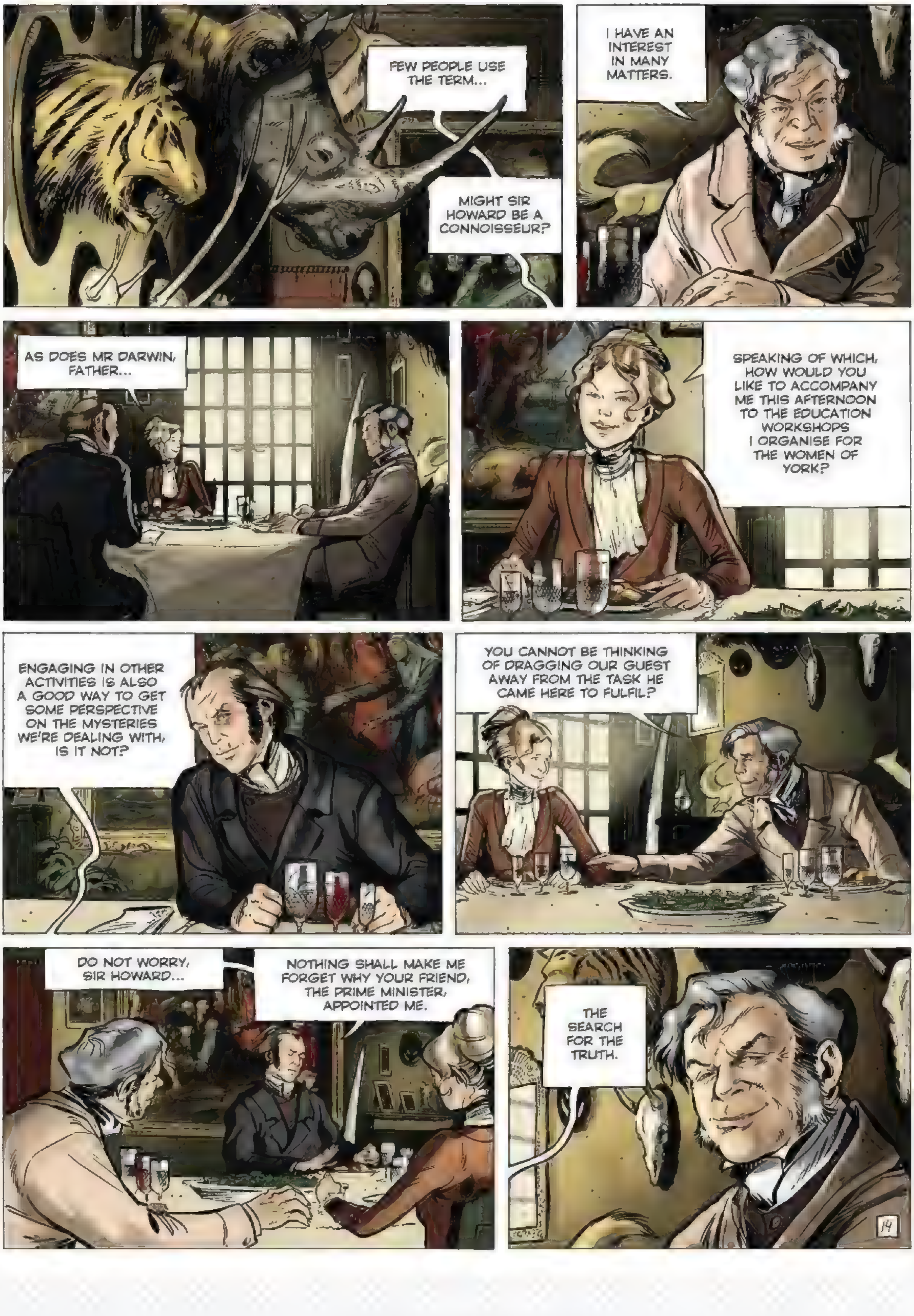

WHAT AMAZES ME ABOUT YOU, OLIVER, IS THAT YOU CAN GET SMASHED TILL SIX IN THE MORNING, YET SHOW UP ON SET AT SEVEN READY TO GO.
YEARS OF PRACTICE, DICKIE BOY, YEARS OF PRACTICE.
WHO WANTS AN ARM WRESTLE, THEN? I'M A BRITISH TRUE BLUE AND WILL TAKE ON ALL-COMERS.
PLEASE SIT DOWN, OLIVER. NO ONE'S INTERESTED.
BUGGER THE LOT OF YOU, THEN.
COME WITH US, MR. REED, WE'LL TAKE YOU UP TO YOUR SUITE.
LATER THAT NIGHT...
COME ON, MY BEAUTIES, COME TO UNCLE OLLIE.
CARROTTS

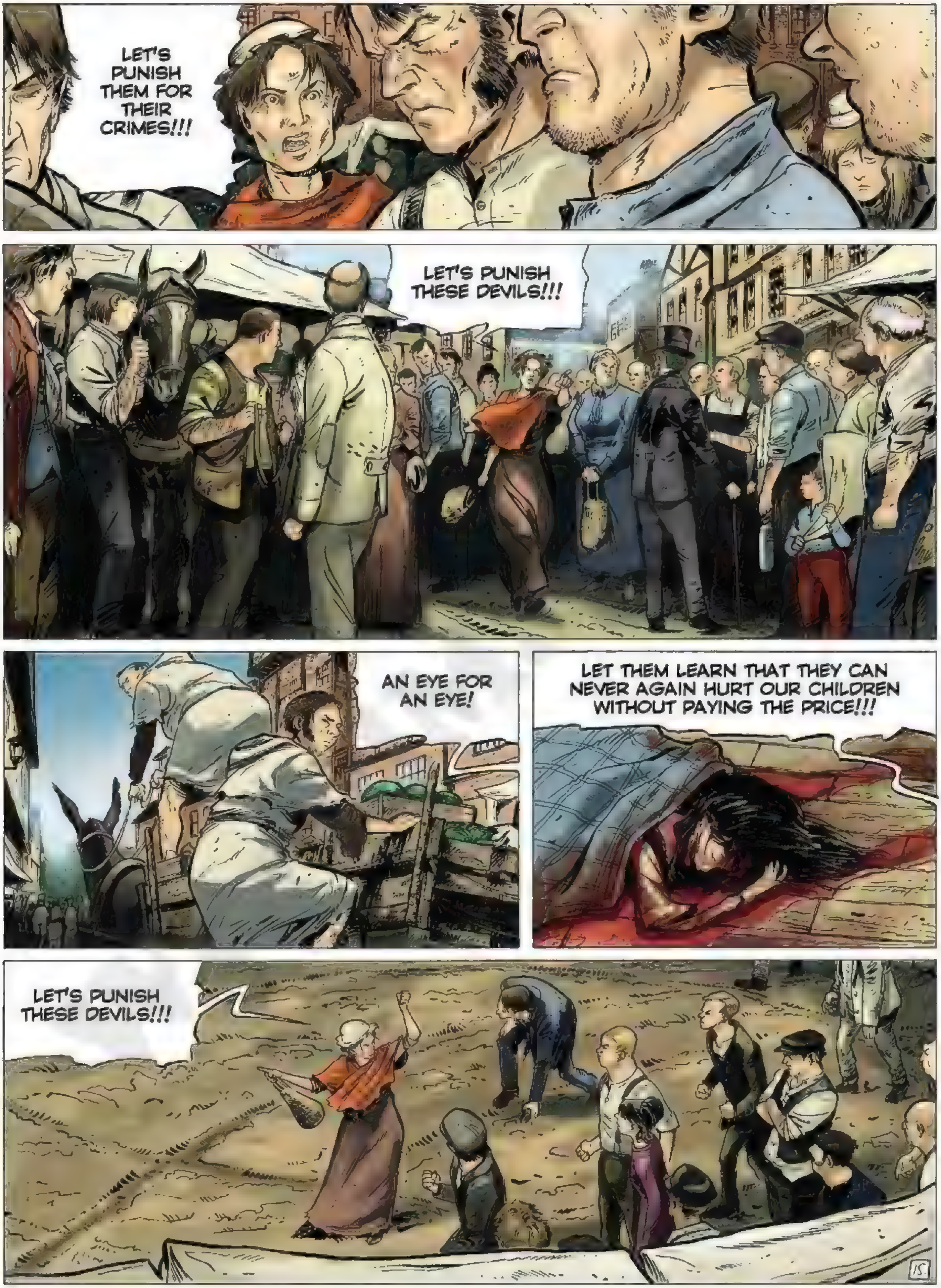

GOOD MORNING, SENORS AND SENORITAS.
POLICE, POLICE!
YOU CAN'T TOUCH ME! I'M ONE OF THE MUSKETEERS!
AFTER THE SUCCESS OF THE THREE MUSKETEERS, I WAS SOMETHING OF A SEX SYMBOL. I MIGHT HAVE LOOKED LIKE A BEDFORD TRUCK, BUT I HAD THE PROMISE OF A V8 ENGINE.
CONSIDERING BURT REYNOLDS' DECISION TO POSE NUDE IN COSMOPOLITAN MAGAZINE, I UNDERSTAND YOU'VE RECENTLY TURNED DOWN A SIMILAR OPPORTUNITY?
CORRECT MADAME,
FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT MY MIGHTY MALLET, MY WAND OF LUST, IS TOO BIG TO FIT ON THE PAGE.
PROVE IT.
IS THAT IT? WHY HAVE YOU STOPPED?

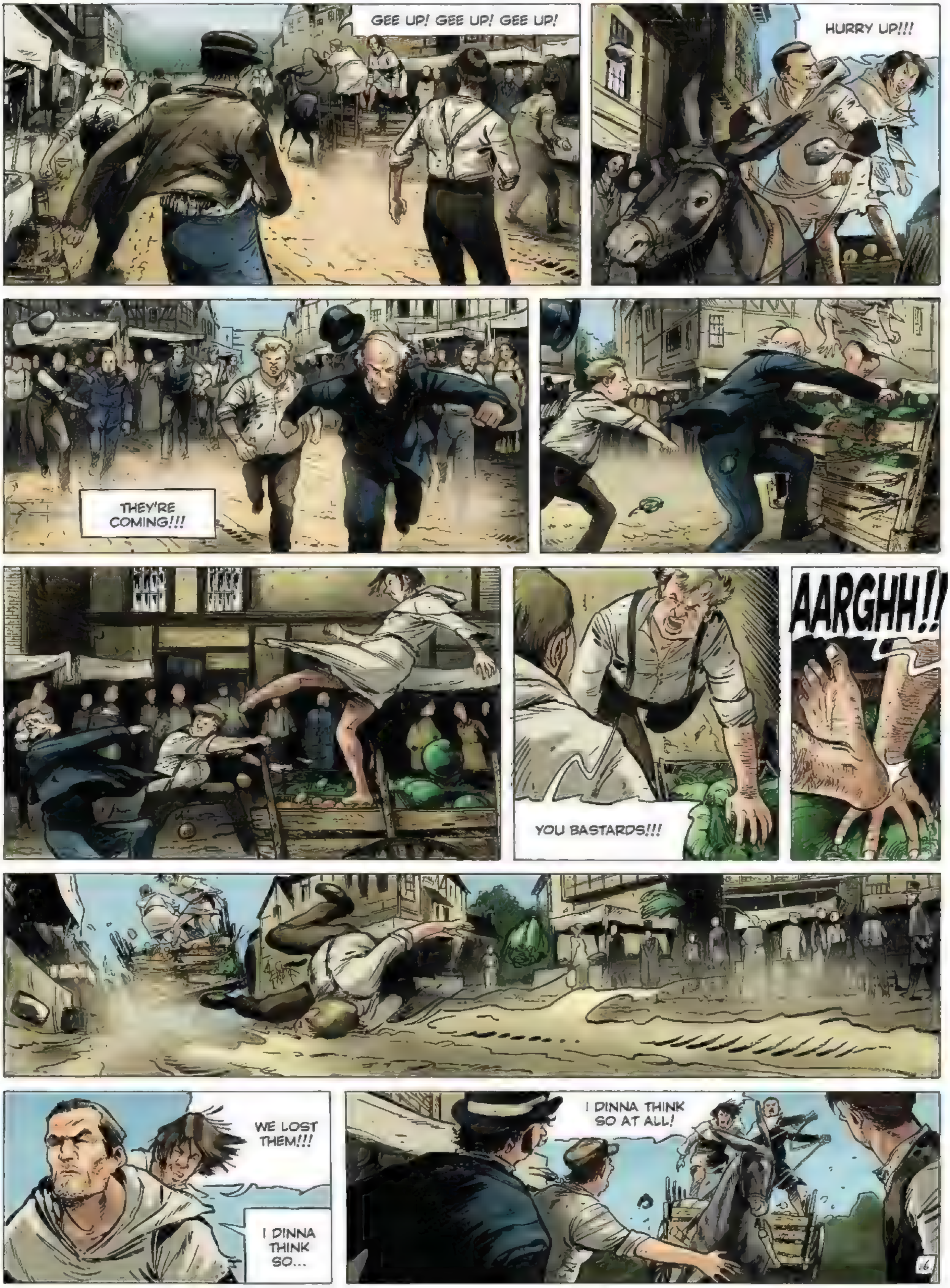

MADAME, IF I'D PULLED IT OUT IN ITS ENTIRETY, I'D HAVE KNOCKED YOUR HAT OFF!
OLIVER, THIS IS STEVE MCQUEEN, HE'S IN TOWN JUST TO MEET YOU. MAYBE YOU TWO SEX SYMBOLS CAN WORK TOGETHER.
FANTASTIC! FANCY A PINT, COOLER KING?
SHOULDN'T YOU EASE BACK ON THE BOOZE, MAN?
WHAT? I CAN DRINK YOU UNDER THE TABLE ANYTIME, SUNSHINE.
YOU BLOODY IDIOT, OLIVER. DON'T YOU WANT TO MAKE IT IN HOLLYWOOD? DON'T YOU WANT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AS A STAR INSTEAD OF WOBBLING ABOUT IN BRITISH MOVIES?
I'M NERVOUS ABOUT GOING TO HOLLYWOOD, MICHAEL, I'M NERVOUS OF BEING WHERE I DON'T FEEL SECURE. I'M MR. ENGLAND!
DRINKING, OF COURSE, IS OFTEN ABOUT INSECURITY. YOU'RE SHY, OLLIE, AND YOU'VE ALWAYS NEEDED A DRINK TO GIVE YOU CONFIDENCE.
I'M MR. ENGLAND, THIS IS WHERE I STAY. I AM DORKING AND DORKING IS ME! LET'S GET DRINKING, LADS.

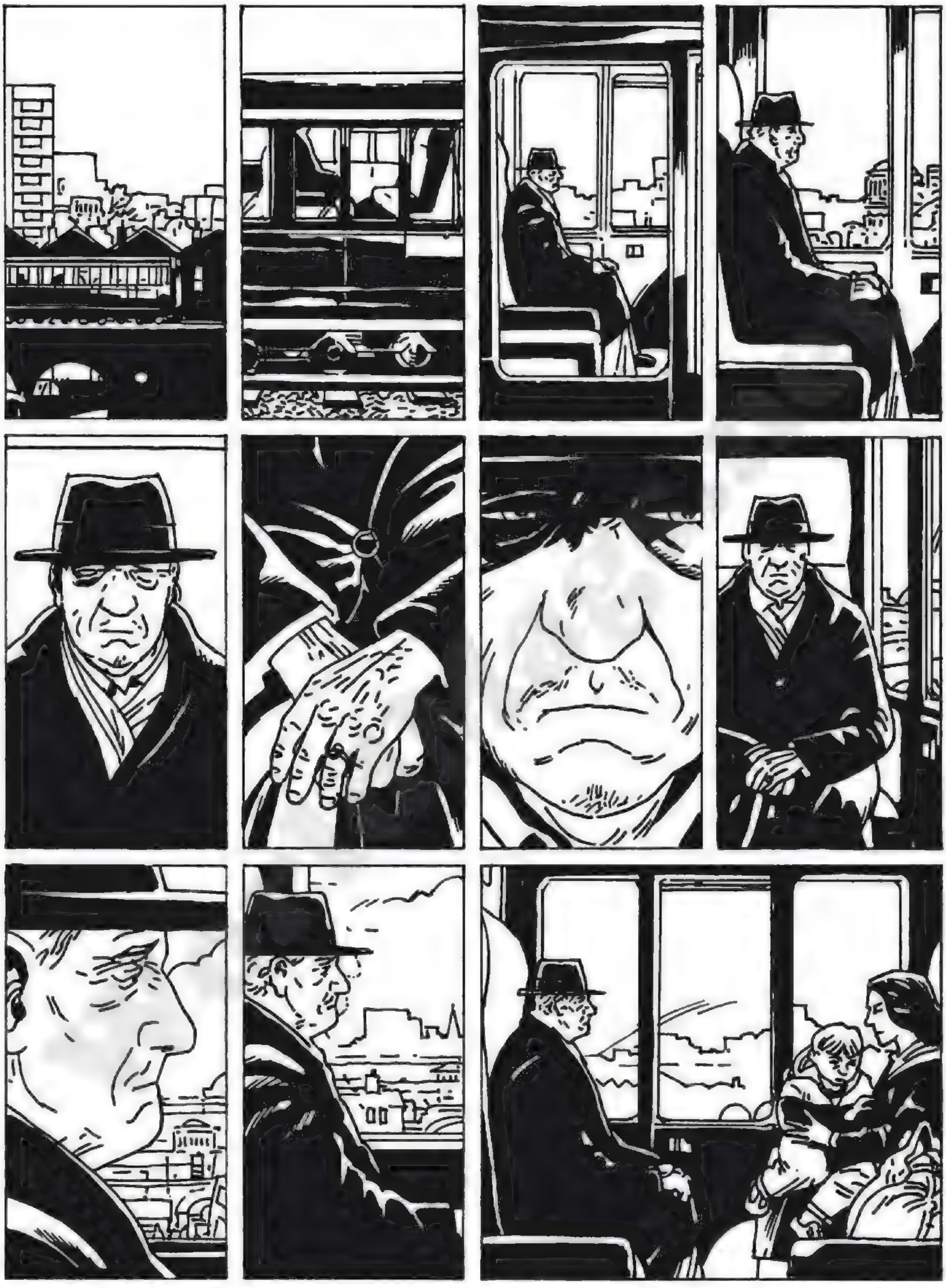

I HOPE YOU LIKE SPICY FOOD!
AFTER MY YEARS IN BOMBAY, I COULD NOT EAT MY FOOD ANY OTHER WAY!
IT'S... IT'S DELICIOUS, SIR HOWARD!
QUITE UNUSUAL... BUT DELICIOUS!
AND DON'T HESITATE TO ASK KALINDA FOR ANOTHER HELPING.
OUR GOOD RAJIV'S DAUGHTER IS AN EXCELLENT COOK. IT'D BE A SHAME NOT TO PARTAKE!
TO THINK THAT SO MANY OF OUR FELLOW BRITONS LOOK DOWN ON INDIAN CUISINE...
SUCH A LACK OF TASTE, IS IT NOT?!

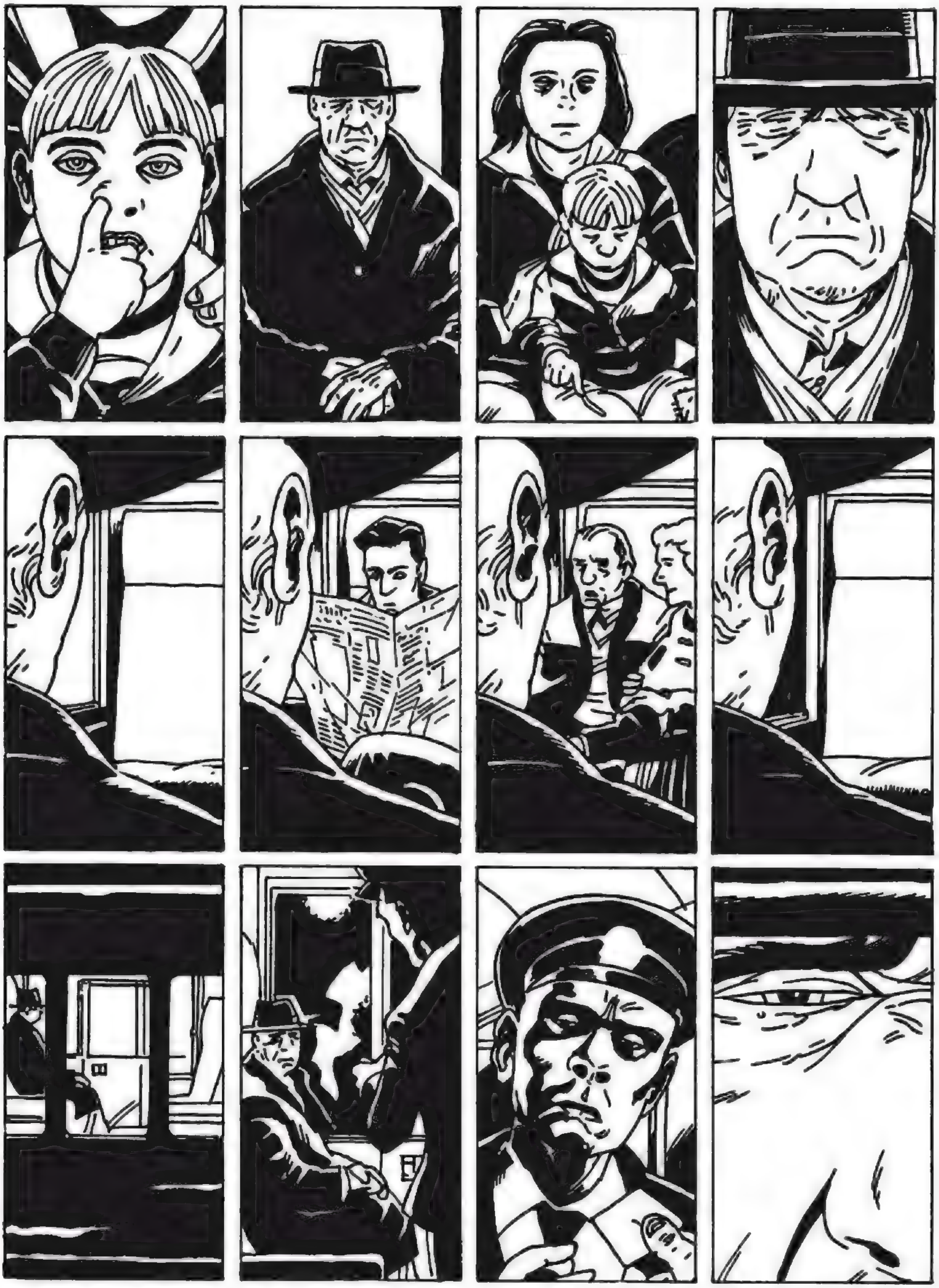

LET'S GET BACK TO WHAT BROUGHT US ALL HERE...
WORK HAS STARTED AGAIN ON THE CONSTRUCTION SITE, AND THAT'S GOOD!
BUT, QUITE FRANKLY, WHAT I READ IN THE PRESS THIS MORNING...
SOME HITHERTO UNKNOWN BIG CAT FROM AFRICA OR INDIA?
MISPLACED BY A RICH COLLECTOR OR A PASSING CIRCUS?
DON'T TELL ME THIS REALLY IS WHAT YOU BELIEVE, MR DARWIN?
I MERELY FAVOUR THE MOST LIKELY HYPOTHESES, SIR HOWARD.
HMMM...
AND WHAT DOES OUR GREAT NATURALIST THINK OF THE POSSIBILITY OF A THERIANTHROPE? THE SHAPE-SHIFTING MEN OF LEGEND?
WOULD THAT BE TOO DARING AN ANSWER FOR THE MAN WHO JUST SHOOK SO MANY OF OUR ESTABLISHED BELIEFS TO THEIR CORE?
A THERIANTHROPE, YOU SAY?
13

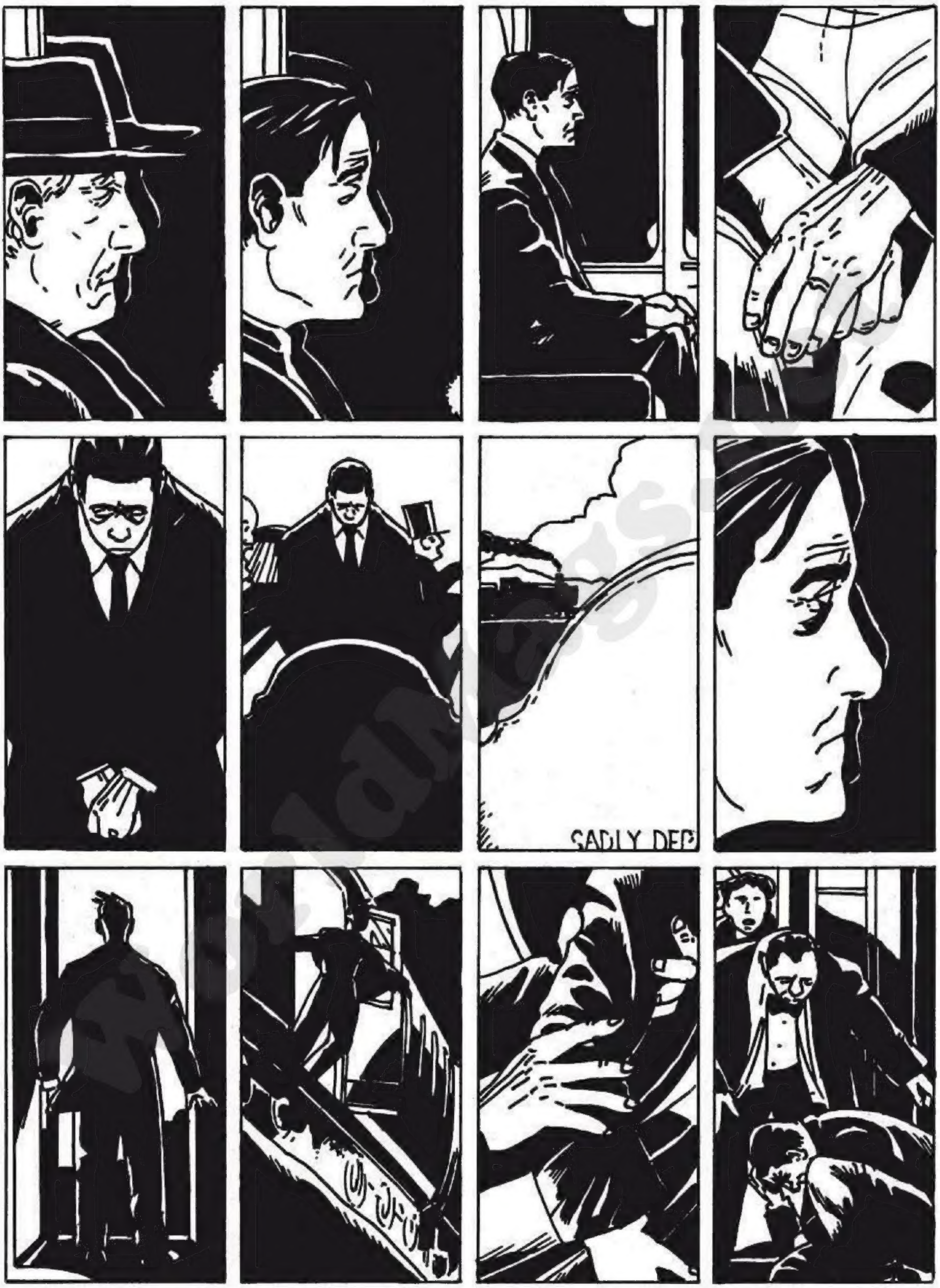

FEW PEOPLE USE THE TERM...
MIGHT SIR HOWARD BE A CONNOISSEUR?
I HAVE AN INTEREST IN MANY MATTERS.
AS DOES MR DARWIN, FATHER...
SPEAKING OF WHICH, HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO ACCOMPANY ME THIS AFTERNOON TO THE EDUCATION WORKSHOPS I ORGANISE FOR THE WOMEN OF YORK?
ENGAGING IN OTHER ACTIVITIES IS ALSO A GOOD WAY TO GET SOME PERSPECTIVE ON THE MYSTERIES WE'RE DEALING WITH, IS IT NOT?
YOU CANNOT BE THINKING OF DRAGGING OUR GUEST AWAY FROM THE TASK HE CAME HERE TO FULFIL?
DO NOT WORRY, SIR HOWARD...
NOTHING SHALL MAKE ME FORGET WHY YOUR FRIEND, THE PRIME MINISTER, APPOINTED ME.
THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH.
14


LET'S PUNISH THEM FOR THEIR CRIMES!!!
LET'S PUNISH THESE DEVILS!!!
AN EYE FOR AN EYE!
LET THEM LEARN THAT THEY CAN NEVER AGAIN HURT OUR CHILDREN WITHOUT PAYING THE PRICE!!!
LET'S PUNISH THESE DEVILS!!!
IS


GEE UP! GEE UP! GEE UP!
HURRY UP!!!
THEY'RE COMING!!!
AARGHH!!
YOU BASTARDS!!!
WE LOST THEM!!!
I DINNA THINK SO...
I DINNA THINK SO AT ALL!






SADLY DEP

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